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The Broken Windows Theory

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ABSTRACT

Any apparent indicators of crime and civil disorder, such as broken windows, loitering, public drinking, and transportation fare evasion, create an urban atmosphere that promotes even more crime and disorder, according to the broken windows theory. The clear advantage of this theory over many of its criminological forerunners is that, rather than relying on social policy, it permits criminal justice policy efforts to impact change. Throughout the 1990s, the broken windows theory had a significant impact on police policy, which has remained relevant into the twenty-first century. One of the most common criticisms of this theory is that by creating a causal link between disorder and crime, it misinterprets the relationship between the two. Broken windows policing is not expressly employed as a means of managing crime in most major cities today due to its contentious nature. However, remnants of this theory can still be found. Regulating crime is a difficult task, but the broken windows theory offers a method for lowering infractions and maintaining social order.

I. TO THE BROKEN WINDOWS THEORY

Any apparent indicators of crime and civil disorder, such as broken windows, loitering, public drinking, and transportation fare evasion, create an urban atmosphere that promotes even more crime and disorder, according to the broken windows theory (Wilson & Kelling, 1982).

Broken windows policing aims to keep low-level criminality under control in order to avoid wider chaos. From a more theoretical point of view, the following factors best help explain why the state of the urban environment might affect crime level:

1. conformity and social norms
2. the presence or lack of routine monitoring;
3. social signaling and signal crime³.

Unwanted individuals and behaviours are removed by repairing these windows, making civilians feel safer. Residents will avoid spending time in community places (parks, local

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³ Charlotte Ruhl, The broken windows theory, Simply psychology, Broken Windows Theory - Simply Psychology

stores, street blocks) to prevent violent attacks from outsiders, and will no longer see their communities as tight-knit, safe areas in instances where damaged windows are left unfixed.

The clear advantage of this theory over many of its criminological forerunners is that, rather than relying on social policy, it permits criminal justice policy efforts to impact change. Earlier theories of social disorganisation and economic theories proposed solutions that were both costly and time-consuming to prove effective. Many individuals believe that by merely modifying the police crime-fighting technique, the broken windows theory may bring about change quickly and cheaply. It is significantly easier to combat disorder than it is to combat grave social evils like poverty and lack of education.

Furthermore, when shattered windows are not repaired, it implies a lack of informal social control. Informal social control encompasses behaviours such as conforming to social standards and acting as a bystander when a crime is committed that is not controlled by the law.

"Prior to the Giuliani election and the adoption of broken windows policing, crime in New York was starting to decline," notes Harcourt, a Columbia law professor. And, of course, what we saw throughout that period, roughly beginning in 1991, was that crime in the country began to decline, with a tremendous drop in violent crime in our country. What's amazing about it now is how pervasive it was."

Following up on the broken windows policing, George Kelling and a colleague discovered what they regarded to be clear proof of its effectiveness. There was a large drop in crime in neighbourhoods where there was a sharp increase in minor arrests, implying that broken windows policing was in effect.

Broken windows had become one of Giuliani's biggest achievements by 2001. In his goodbye message, he stressed the success's beautiful and straightforward notion.

"The broken windows theory replaced the assumption that we were too busy to see street-level prostitution, panhandling or graffiti," he explained. Their argument connects a community's dysfunction and incivility to the later prevalence of serious crime.

Throughout the 1990s, the broken windows theory had a significant impact on police policy, which has remained relevant into the twenty-first century. The approach was most famously applied under the guidance of Police Commissioner William Bratton in New York City. He and others believed that the New York City Police Department's strong order-maintenance techniques were to blame for the city's remarkable fall in crime rates throughout the 1990s.

The study of political scientist Wesley Skogan, who discovered that particular sorts of social and physical disorders were linked to certain types of major crime, provided the strongest empirical support for the idea of the broken window. Skogan, on the other hand, cautioned against misinterpreting his findings as proof of the broken windows theory's veracity.

II. CAN THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY BE CONNECTED TO REPAIRING “BROKEN WINDOWS”?

Residents have a higher sense of safety in a well-kept and welcoming neighbourhood, even if it is blighted. Building and maintaining social infrastructures, such as public libraries, parks, and busy retail corridors, might be a more sustainable alternative for residents and improve their daily life.

Graffiti, abandoned buildings, panhandling, and other signs of disorder in neighbourhoods, researchers hypothesised more than 35 years ago, create an environment that favours criminal activity.

Such qualities, according to the so-called "broken windows theory," send the message that these places aren't being watched and that crime will go unpunished. The argument has prompted authorities to press down on minor offences in the hopes of preventing more significant offences, as well as studies into how chaos impacts people's health.

Northeastern University researchers claim to have disproved the “broken windows theory.” They discovered that disorder in a neighbourhood does not lead to people breaking the law, committing more crimes, having a negative opinion of their neighbourhood, or engaging in dangerous or unhealthy behaviour, according to published research in the *Annual Review of Criminology and Social Science & Medicine*.

“In terms of how disorder impacts individuals, the body of data for the broken windows theory does not stand,” said Daniel T. O'Brien, associate professor at Northeastern University's School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs and School of Criminology and Criminal Justice.

III. IS YOUR WINDOW BROKEN?

In the neighbourhood, there is a dimly lit area. A tiny group of anti-socials congregates there at night for a drinking session under the cover of darkness. If the association fails to solve this issue, the chances are that the space will begin to draw more anti-socials.

If a window in an uninhabited property is smashed as a result of vandalism and the offenders are not prosecuted and the window is not repaired, the window is likely to be destroyed again and again.

(A) Be a watchful neighbour

Keep an eye on your neighbours when they're gone. This will benefit you in the long run. If a crime in an empty house in your neighbourhood is not investigated, the area may attract more criminal activity, and one day, your home may be the victim of a crime.

A few inhabitants of G.R. Street, a Manimangalam neighbourhood, proven to be vigilant and proactive neighbours. An auditor and his wife from G.R. Street departed for Delhi early this year. A few vigilant neighbours noticed their locked house was lit while passing by. The television was on and they could hear it. They were intrigued by the couple's excursion to Delhi. Strangers were inside the residence when they peered in through the window⁴.

This was a clear case of a break-in. The neighbours locked the door from outside, trapping the criminals inside, and called in the Manimangalam police. The sub-inspector Shanmugam and certain other police personnel reached the spot in no time and nabbed the thieves.

(B) Stitch in time

A few years ago, petty crime became a focus in Kolathur's Vanasakthi Nagar Extension and nearby regions due to neglect of civic issues.

Residents claim that the roads were damaged and impassable and that the local government did not get them repaired.

Residents claimed that the police patrol truck avoided them because of the state of the roads. Residents claimed that the roadways were also inadequately lit and that this issue was not rectified. And then it began.

Petty robbers began to prey on the residents of the area. Gas cylinders, ornamental lights, and even a few important items were taken from some homes in a short amount of time.

(C) Watch your road

Residents must recognise that the roads in their neighbourhood are a component of their living environment. They must keep an eye on what happens there if they care about their well-being.

Residents of K.K. Nagar's R.K. Shanmuganathan Salai learned this lesson the hard way. They came across Metrowater's tanker vehicles parked illegally on this road. These tankers were parked on the side of the road to fill up with water from a Metrowater pumping station. The residents had anticipated any issues that might arise as a result of this. This area became a major "parking site" for large tankers over time. Residents said that after dusk, anti-socials began to

⁴ Shiba kurian, Is your window broken? , The hindu, Is your window broken? - The Hindu

hide behind the tanks. Several small crimes, such as chain stealing, began to occur in the area. Two investigations were done by O'Brien and his research collaborators, Brandon Welsh, a professor of criminology and criminal justice at Northeastern University, and doctorate student Chelsea Farrell. One study, published in the *Annual Review of Criminology*, looked at whether crime is affected by the disorder. The other, which was published in *Social Science & Medicine*, looked at how disturbance affects public health.

In an article published in April by the Scholars Strategy Network, O'Brien summarised the findings of both investigations. Brandon Welsh has published a new study on the long-term impacts of a 70-year-old programme to prevent crime among young people living in metropolitan settings.

They wanted to see if the hypothesis of "broken windows" was correct. They wanted to know if disorder causes crime and if it has a negative influence on public health. The study discovered that disorganization in a neighborhood does not lead to an increase in crime among its population.

No consistent evidence was found that disorder may increase the levels of aggression or make the neighborhood residents feel more negative. In the same paper published in the *Annual Review of Criminology*, they also wrote that it was not found that such signs of physical and social disrepair discourage people from going outside⁵.

However, the researchers did discover a link between illness and mental health. Higher mental health issues and prevalence in drugs and alcohol abuse were found to be in people living in neighborhoods with more graffiti, abandoned buildings, and other such characteristics. However, they claim that the increased chance of abusing drugs and alcohol is linked to mental health rather than being caused directly by disorder.

IV. DO BROKEN WINDOWS POLICIES WORK?

Most importantly, evidence shows that criminal activity was dropping on its own due to a variety of demographic and socioeconomic factors, so credit for the shift could not be solely given to broken-windows enforcement methods. According to experts, there is "no foundation for a simple first-order disorder-crime link," as Columbia law professor Bernard E. Harcourt points out. Misconduct has a wide range of causes that are both complex and varied.

⁵ Greg St. Martin, Do more broken windows mean more crime, Northeastern University researchers find little evidence for 'broken windows theory,' say neighborhood disorder doesn't cause crime - News @ Northeastern - News @ Northeastern

V. IS THE BROKEN WINDOWS MODEL EFFECTIVE?

The success of this strategy is determined by how it is implemented. In 2016, Dr. Charles Branas spearheaded a project in Philadelphia's high-crime areas to restore abandoned homes and turn vacant lots into community parks, which resulted in a 39 percent drop in gun violence. Neighborhoods can be improved and crime can be minimised by constructing "palaces for the people" using these safe and sustainable alternatives⁶.

Misdemeanor arrests have been the most common sign of broken windows policing, in part because this information is easily available. Arrests, on the other hand, fall short of capturing an approach described by Kelling and Coles in 1996 as expressly including community outreach and officer discretion. Many police stops and confrontations with civilians in broken windows policing do not result in an arrest.

Kelling and Coles (1996) outline a more community-oriented strategy to collaborating with citizens and community groups to fight disorder collectively while still respecting offenders' civil liberties, as opposed to a zero-tolerance policy focused solely on arresting all minor offenders⁷.

There's also no agreement on whether or not there's a link between chaos and crime, or how to measure it if one does exist. Skogan's (1990) research in six cities did reveal a link between disorder and subsequent major crime, but Harcourt (2001) concluded that there was no substantial link between disorder and serious crime in a re-analysis of Skogan's (1990) data. As a result, there is no clear response to the question of whether there is a link between crime and disorder, or if existing evidence supports or refutes the notion of shattered windows.

In high-crime areas, police have regularly used disarray as a strategy. Officers adopted aggressive order maintenance as a tactic to minimise violent crime in the Braga et al. (1999) problem-oriented policing hot areas study in Jersey City, NJ, and the results revealed significantly positive results. As a result, we believe that broken windows policing approaches will be most effective when combined with knowledge of small geographic areas where crime is concentrated.

VI. OTHER DOMAINS RELEVANT TO BROKEN WINDOWS

The shattered windows idea has implications in a number of other domains. Real estate is the first. As a result, some argue that the real estate business should employ the broken windows

⁶ Psychology today, Broken Windows Theory | Psychology Today

⁷ CEBCP, Broken Windows Policing - The Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (CEBCP)

idea to boost the value of an apartment, a house, or even a whole neighborhood. They might improve in value if the windows are fixed and the area is cleaned up (Harcourt & Ludwig, 2006).

As a result, gentrification, the process by which impoverished urban places are transformed into wealthier residential places may occur. While some may argue that this is good for the economy and provides a safe environment for people to live in, it frequently displaces families with low-income and hinders them from moving into regions that they could afford previously.

Another area that a broken window is related to is education⁸. The broken windows hypothesis is applied in this case to enhance classroom order. Students are used to replacing individuals who are involved in illegal activities in this situation. The notion is that when students see disorder or others breaching classroom norms, they see it as an open invitation to add to the chaos.

Stephen Plank and colleagues conducted a study from 2004 to 2006 that examined the association between the physical look of mid-Atlantic schools and student behaviour, similar to prior studies. As a result, the researchers recommended instructors pay attention to the school's exterior appearance in order to foster a productive classroom atmosphere where pupils are less prone to spread disordered conduct. Despite the fact that a significant amount of evidence appears to support the broken windows idea, it is not without its detractors, particularly in recent years.

VII. MISINTERPRETING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DISORDER AND CRIME

One of the most common criticisms of this theory is that by creating a causal link between disorder and crime, it misinterprets the relationship between the two. Rather, some scholars think that a third element, collective efficacy, or resident cohesion mixed with shared expectations for social management of public space, is the true causal agent behind crime rates.

A meta-analysis of 300 research published in 2019 found that neighborhood disorder does not drive inhabitants to commit more crime. The researchers looked at studies that tested the extent to which disorder influenced people's decisions to commit crimes, increased their fear of crime in their communities, and influenced their perceptions of their surroundings.

Similarly, David Thatcher argued in a study published in the *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* in 2003 that the broken window policing was not as effective as it appeared. The decline in crime rates in places like New York City was not due to this new law enforcement

⁸ Charlotte Ruhl, The broken windows theory, *Simply psychology*, Broken Windows Theory - Simply Psychology

strategy. It was argued that believing this was mixing up correlation and causation. Instead, Thatcher says that decreased crime rates were due to a variety of other variables, none of which included an increase in misdemeanor arrests.

In terms of the precise variables that contributed to lower crime rates, some experts refer to the waning of the cocaine pandemic and strong enforcement of the Rockefeller drug laws as contributing factors.

Other factors, such as New York City's economic growth in the late 1990s, contributed significantly to the reduction in crime, far more so than instituting the broken windows policy. Furthermore, cities that did not use broken windows reported a crime reduction.

They discovered that, contrary to the broken windows theory, which predicted that these renters would commit fewer crimes if they were transferred to more orderly areas, they continued to commit crimes at the same rate. Clear evidence is thus shown by this study that broken windows may not really be the causal agent in crime reduction.

VIII. RESULTING IN RACIAL AND CLASS BIAS

One of the most common objections towards the broken windows theory is that it promotes racial and class prejudice. Giving police considerable freedom in defining disorder and determining who engages in disorderly behaviour allows them to freely and easily criminalize communities of colour and low-income groups (Roberts, 1998).

People in two neighbourhoods with identical amounts of graffiti and garbage, for example, saw more disorder in communities with more African Americans, according to Sampson and Raudenbush.

The researchers discovered that African Americans and other minority groups are more closely associated with crime and disorder than their white counterparts. This can lead to unequal policing in places where people of colour are the majority. Furthermore, people who are financially insecure and may be members of a minority group are more prone to commit crimes in the first place.

As a result, persons without access to private locations, such as the homeless, are unduly criminalized.

As a result, by policing these little infractions, or even activities that aren't crimes at all, police forces are battling poverty crimes rather than striving to equip folks with the means that will eliminate the need for crime.

IX. CONCLUSION

Broken windows policing is not expressly employed as a means of managing crime in most major cities today due to its contentious nature. However, remnants of this theory can still be found.

Cities like Ferguson, Missouri, are extensively policed, and the city issues hundreds of warrants each year for crimes like breaking windows, ranging from parking fines to traffic violations. And the racial and class biases that such an approach to law enforcement produces haven't gone away.

Regulating crime is a difficult task, but the broken windows theory offers a method for lowering infractions and maintaining social order.
