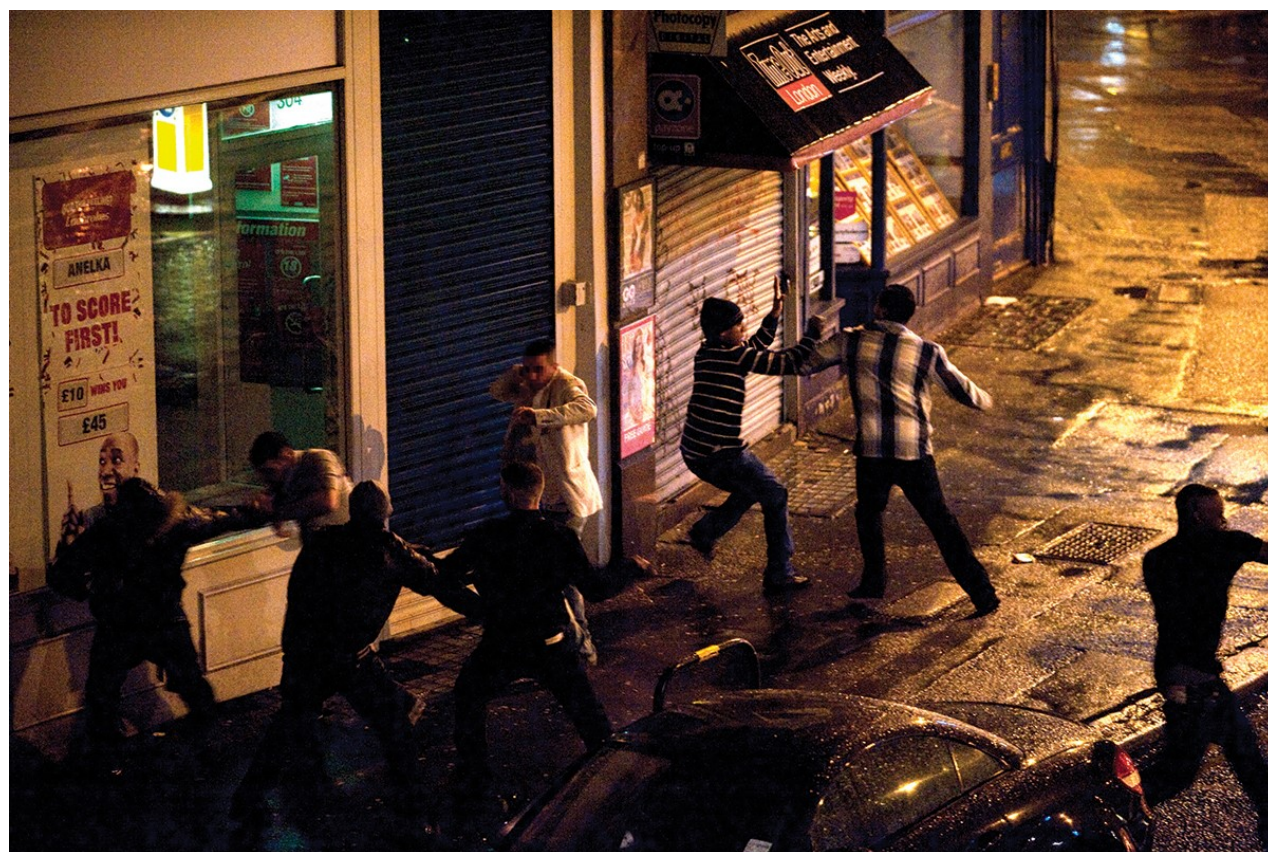


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Men are more violent when there are more women around



More women, more fights
ANDREW TESTA/PANOS

By Andy Coghlan

MORE men inevitably means more testosterone-fuelled violence, right? Wrong, according to an analysis exploring how ratios of men to women affect crime rates across the US.

In areas where men outnumber women, there were lower rates of murders and assaults as well as fewer sex-related crimes, including rapes, sex offences and prostitution. Conversely, higher rates of these crimes occurred in areas where there were more women than men.

Ryan Schacht at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City and his colleagues analysed sex-ratio data from 3082 US counties, provided by the US Census Bureau in 2010. They compared this with crime data for the same year, issued by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation. They only included information about women and men of reproductive age.

For all five types of offence analysed, rising proportions of men in a county correlated with fewer crimes – even when accounting for other potential contributing factors such as poverty. The results suggest that current policies aimed at defusing violence and crime by reducing the amount of men in male-dominated areas may backfire (*Human Nature*, doi.org/brbb).

When women are in short supply, men perceive them as being a more valuable resource, says Schacht. Consequently, men must be more dutiful to win and retain a female partner. In an abundance of women, men are spoilt for choice and adopt promiscuous behaviour that brings them into conflict with other men, and makes them more likely to commit sex-related offences.

“Work in animals also shows quite similar findings to ours, that when females are abundant and males rare, males are more violently competitive, more promiscuous and less likely to invest in offspring,” says Schacht.

“Schacht’s findings are in line with ‘mating-market theory,’” says David Buss of the University of Texas at Austin. The results tally with his own work, which shows that when women outnumber men, there are more short-term relationships, divorce rates increase and men become more reluctant to commit to one partner.

The upshot, says Schacht, is that men alter their behaviour to suit conditions of supply and demand. “In some situations they will be much better behaved, and in others they will be much more prone to nasty behaviour,” he says.

The work also has implications for crime prevention, he says: “We are overly focused on male excess when we should reorient to places with more women.”

Leader: “Politicians may push up violent crime by getting tough on it”

This article appeared in print under the headline “Men get violent if women are aplenty”

Leader: “Politicians may push up violent crime by getting tough on it”

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