

*Annual Review of Criminology*

# Does Nothing Stop a Bullet Like a Job? The Effects of Income on Crime

Jens Ludwig<sup>1,2</sup> and Kevin Schnepel<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Harris School of Public Policy, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, USA;  
email: jludwig@uchicago.edu

<sup>2</sup>National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

<sup>3</sup>Department of Economics, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada;  
email: kevin\_schnepel@sfu.ca

ANNUAL  
REVIEWS **CONNECT**

[www.annualreviews.org](http://www.annualreviews.org)

- Download figures
- Navigate cited references
- Keyword search
- Explore related articles
- Share via email or social media

Annu. Rev. Criminol. 2025. 8:269–89

The *Annual Review of Criminology* is online at  
[criminol.annualreviews.org](http://criminol.annualreviews.org)

<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-criminol-111523-122257>

Copyright © 2025 by the author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See credit lines of images or other third-party material in this article for license information.



## Keywords

crime, violence, income, jobs, social policy, social programs

## Abstract

Do jobs and income-transfer programs affect crime? The answer depends on why one is asking the question, which shapes what one means by “crime.” Many studies focus on understanding why overall crime rates vary across people, places, and time; because 80% of all crimes are property offenses, that is what this type of research typically explains. But if the goal is to understand what to do about the crime problem, the focus should instead be on serious violent crimes, which the best available estimates suggest seem to account for the majority of the social costs of crime. The best available evidence suggests that policies that reduce economic desperation reduce property crime (and, hence, overall crime rates) but have little systematic relationship to violent crime. The difference in impacts arguably stems in large part from the fact that most violent crimes, including murder, are not crimes of profit but rather crimes of passion, including rage. Policies to alleviate material hardship, as important and useful as those are for improving people’s lives and well-being, are not by themselves sufficient to also substantially alleviate the burden of violent crime on society.