ATTITUDES TO CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN ENGLAND AND WALES, 1964-2023

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The forgotten town angry locals fear is becoming UK's new gun crime capital

Fear of crime soars under SNP with almost half of Scots in DIY 'padlocked' communities

EXCLUSIVE 'I'd NEVER come out at night': Inside the city where locals are terrified to leave their homes as blood-thirsty drugs gangs hunt victims with baseball bats and knives

Sadiq Khan has arrogantly ignored spiralling crime in London, says Susan Hall

A city in mourning with students 'living in fear': How 'terrified' undergraduates are afraid to walk the streets of Nottingham

Terrified Bournemouth residents say they're too scared to go out at night

THE DISCOVERY OF 'FEAR OF CRIME'

Early polling by Gallup:

– Should the death penalty be abolished? (1938)

– Do you think that homosexuality is a serious problem in this country or not very serious? (1957)

– Do you think our system of law and justice is or is not efficient and fair to everyone? (1963)

Move to victimization surveys:

– Small-scale pilot survey in London (1973)

– British Crime Survey (1983)

EXISTING FINDINGS

1. CSEW data shows fear of crime declining with actual crime rates (Hough 2017)

2. 'Penal populism' increased from mid-1980s (Jennings et al. 2017)

3. Punitiveness and crime concern fell from mid-2000s (Enns et al. 2022)

But need to replicate and synthesise existing datasets! (Ioannidis 2005; Moody, Keister, and Ramos 2022; Nosek and Errington 2020; Pridemore, Makel, and Plucker 2018; Schmidt 2009)

SOURCES OF POLLING DATA

– British Election Study (1963-2023)

– British Social Attitude survey (1983-2023)

– Crime Survey for England and Wales (1981-2023)

– YouGov Crime Trackers collection (2019–2023)

– YouGov Most Important Issue Tracker (2011–2023)

– Ipsos Issues Tracker (1974–2023)

– Various Gallup polls (1938-2000)

FULL DATASET

	Crime concern	Prioritization	Death penalty	Punitiveness
Series	60	5	24	43
Pairs	621	132	159	278
Years	1965–2023	1973–2023	1962–2023	1981–2023

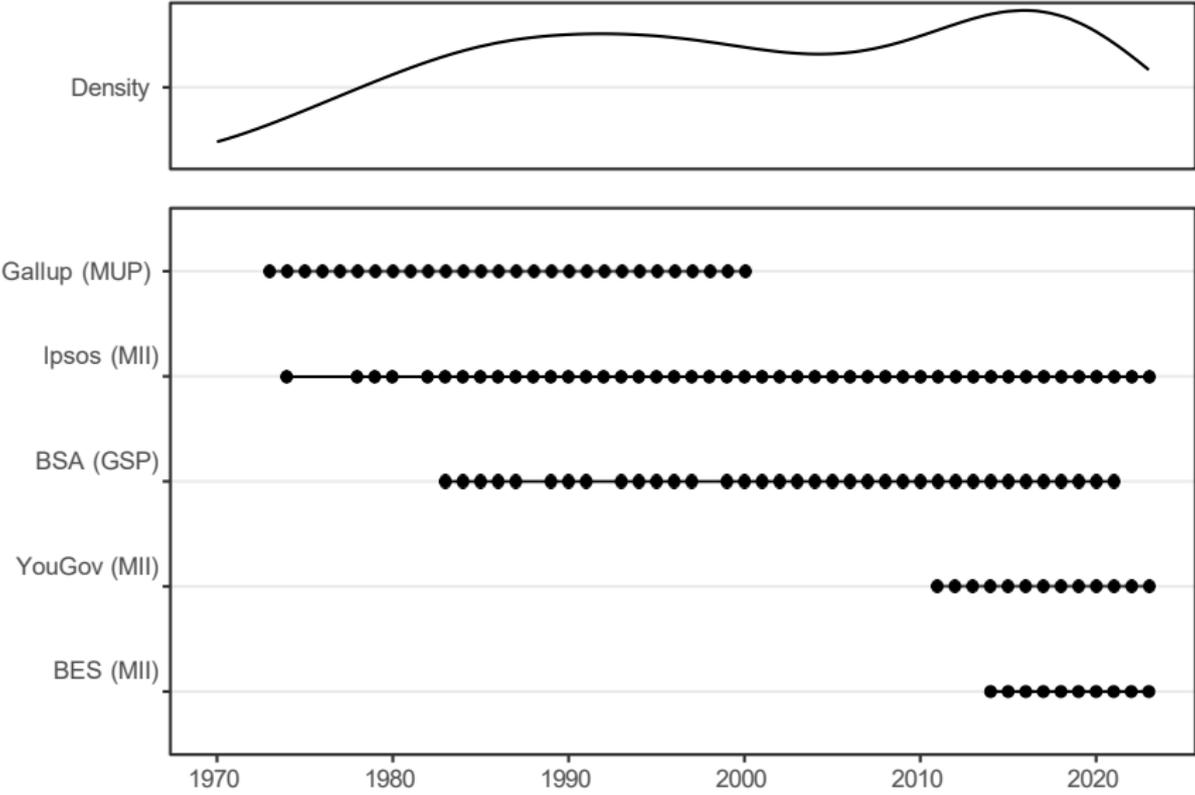Total = 1,190 question-year pairs

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR CRIME CONCERN

Question series	Pairs
Do you think the level of crime is getting higher, getting lower or staying about the same? (BES)	7
How common or uncommon is this in your area? People attacked in the streets (BSA)	3
How common is it for people's homes to be burgled in this area? (BSA)	5
How safe do you feel walking alone in this area after dark? (CSEW)	26

DYAD-RATIO ALGORITHM
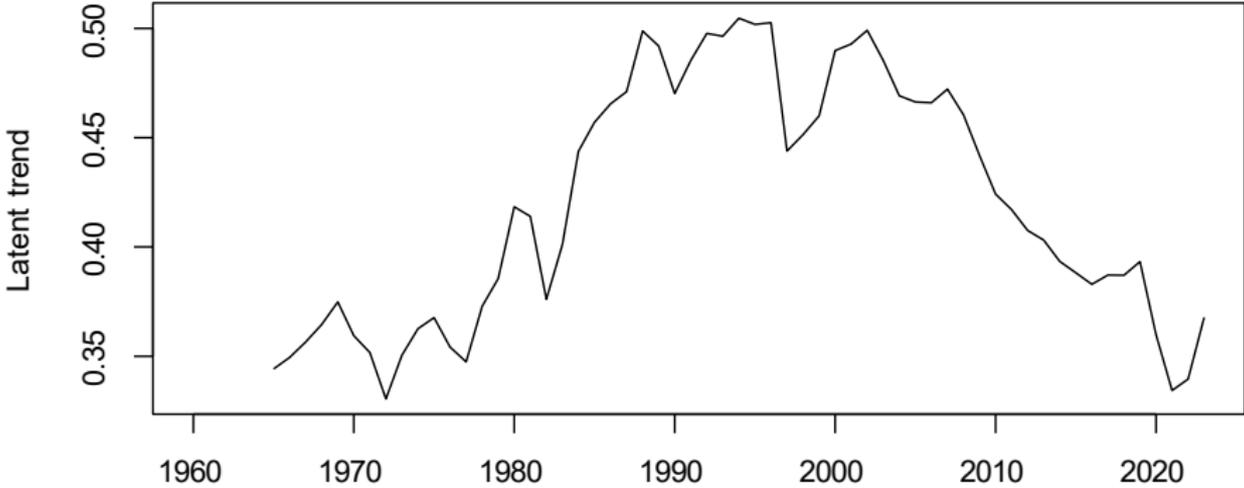
From Stimson (2018):

1. Every time (t) a question (i) is asked, turn it into a ratio: $R_{i,t=2} = \frac{x_{i,t=2}}{x_{i,t=1}}$

2. At each t, take the mean of available ratios: $\overline{R_{i,t}}$

3. Take arbitrary initial value and multiply by ratios to create latent trend: $Trend_{t=1} = 100$, $Trend_{t=2} = 100 * \overline{R_{i,t=2}}$, ...

4. Perform this recursive estimation forwards and backwards, then take average

5. Weight each question series by its correlation to latent trend, then recalculate and re-weight iteratively until they converge

6. Apply exponential smoothing
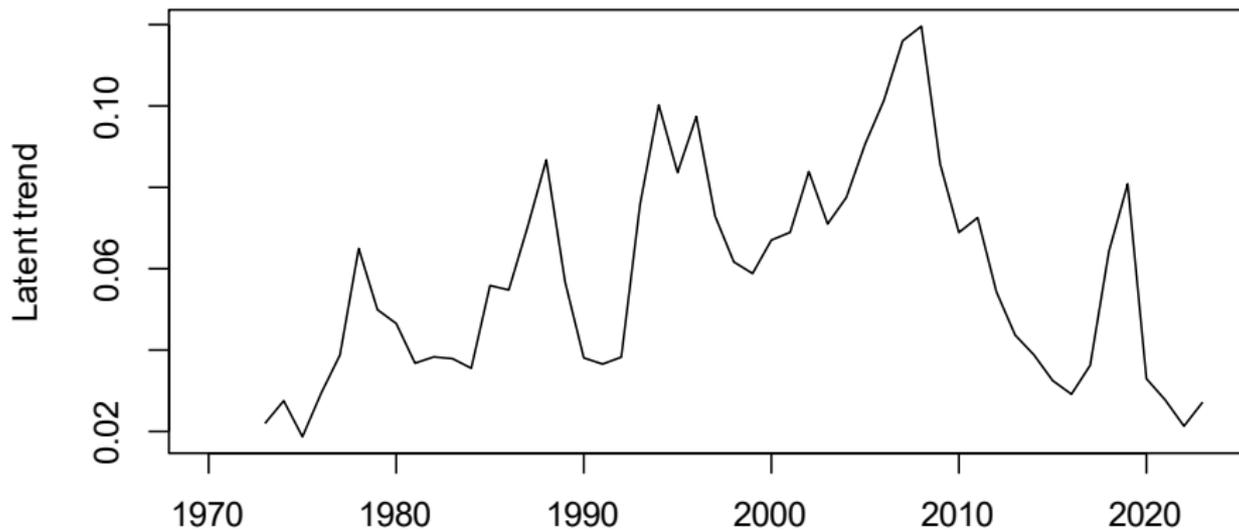
QUESTION SERIES FOR PRIORITISATION

Source: Tiratelli (2025)
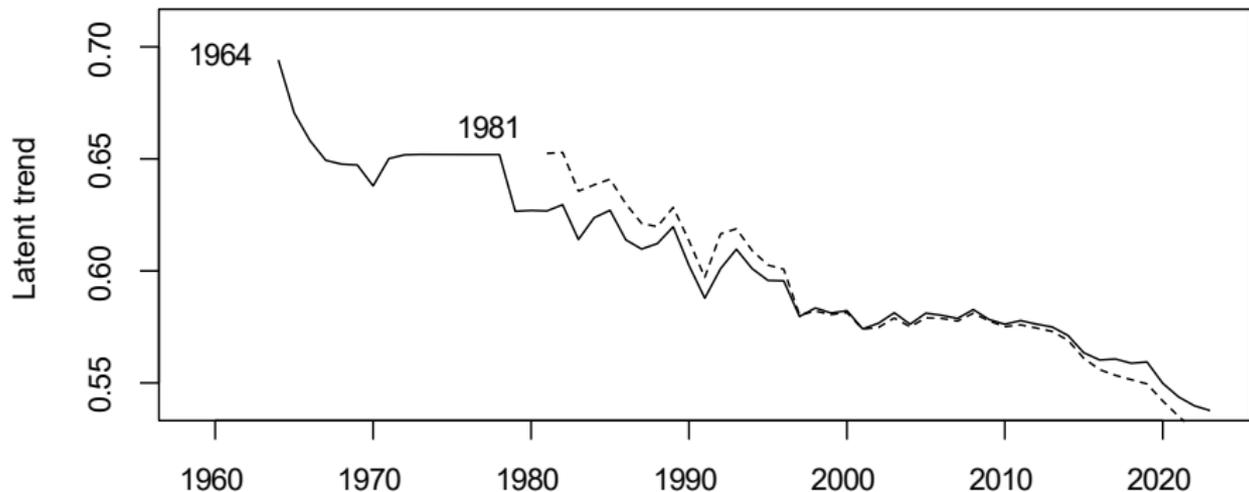
CRIME CONCERN IN ENGLAND AND WALES (1965-2023)

Source: Tiratelli (2025)

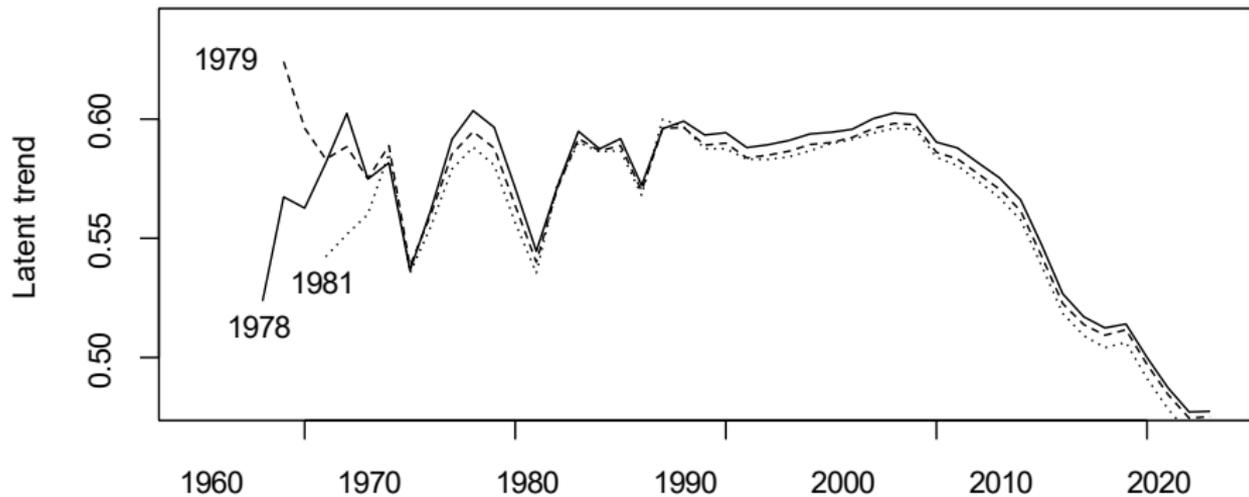# PRIORITISATION OF CRIME AS A SOCIAL ISSUE (1973-2023)

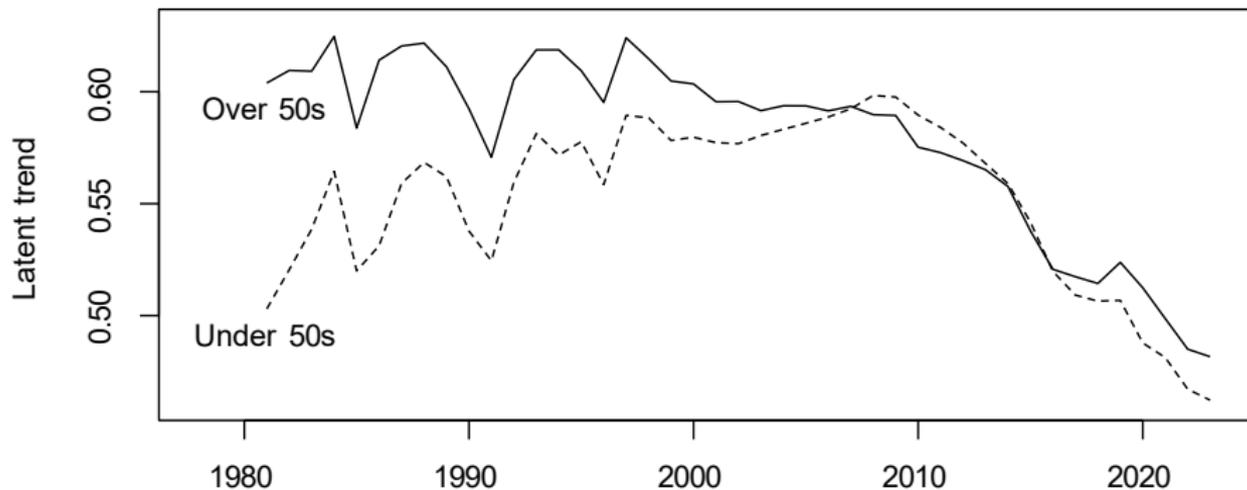# SUPPORT FOR THE DEATH PENALTY (1964-2023)

Source: Tiratelli (2025)

PUNITIVENESS (1978-2023)

Source: Tiratelli (2025)

PUNITIVENESS BY AGE (1981-2023)

Source: Tiratelli (2025)

TOUGH ON CRIME, TOUGH ON THE CAUSES OF CRIME

The New Labour years:

    – Crime concern still high

    – Punitiveness stabilised at high level

    – Law-and-order became a priority issue

N.B. Cohort effects start coming into play (Grasso et al. 2019; Gray et al. 2019)

CHANGES SINCE 2010

– Crime has been falling steadily for 30 years

– Public concern about crime decreasing (recent reversals?)

– Punitiveness down

– Prioritisation also down

But political class still stuck in 'tough on crime' mode!

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