CRIMINAL ENVIRONMENT AND SUPPORT FOR THE LAW

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The question of who supports the law is commonly approached within a framework of social stratification analysis. Pressure to pass certain laws and willingness to assist the agents of law enforcement are often related to social status and political power. Marx and Engels (1947) were among the first to see the law and support for the law in terms of the interests of various groups in the stratification system, arguing that the law is a tool employed by the bourgeoisie to oppress and exploit the proletariat. In another historical study, Ranulf (1964) concluded that the "distinterested tendency to inflict punishment" is concentrated in the petty bourgeoisie or lower-middle class, suggesting that it is in that level of the social hierarchy where one will find the greatest support for the law, or at least the punitive aspects of the law. Not too different from this is the conclusion reached by Marshall (1968) which is that middle-class values have long been critical in determining what types of social behavior will be labeled criminal.

A type of study other than general historical analysis which has come to similar conclusions about support for the law is based on research that asks subjects to assign hypothetical punishments to a series of criminal acts. Such studies have often been used to gauge perceived seriousness of crimes relative to one another, but they have also led to conclusions about the social distribution of support for the law as measured by expressed willingness to punish hypothetical law violators. Gilbert (1958), Rose and Prell (1955), and Smigel (1956) have all concluded that subjects or "judges" from backgrounds of higher socioeconomic status assign harsher penalties than subjects from lower status backgrounds. Smigel (1956: 322) and Rose and Prell (1955: 257) have also shown that lower-status

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subjects are more flexible in their assignment of punishments, being willing to vary punishments with the type of victim or the background of the offender. These studies lend further support to the argument that middle-class individuals support the law with greater strength than lower-class persons.

The purpose of this paper is to examine support for the law in a context different from the one employed by students who have concentrated on the position in the stratification system of individuals who do or do not support the law. In this study, support for the law will be examined in the context of what will be called the "criminal environment" of a community. This refers to the role of crime in the social environment of a community and the residents of that community. It encompasses official crime rates in the area, perception of those rates by residents of the area, actual experiences of victimization, vicarious experiences such as conversations and local legends about crime, and exposure to crime news in the media. Not all of these aspects of the criminal environment will be explored in this study, but a number of different indicators will be examined.

The criminal environment of two communities—one urban and one suburban—will be investigated and then related to support for the law by residents of the two areas. The relationship between criminal environment (or salience of crime to residents of an area) and support for the law is not one that is clear prior to making an empirical test. One might argue that if crime is a more salient aspect of life in a community, residents will be anxious to support the law by reporting violations to the police, by testifying in court, and by generally assisting law enforcement officials in their efforts. However, one might also argue that if crime is salient, it is also threatening. Such a threat may reduce support for the law because individuals fear reprisals or because they feel helpless to do anything about crime. Both types of relationship between criminal evironment and support for the law are tenable, but have not been empirically examined. This paper will explore that relationship.

Methods

A sample of 200 subjects from each of two communities in a large metropolitan area in the eastern United States was selected from a list of all persons over the age of 20 who lived in the area on January 1, 1968. State law requires all cities and towns to compile such a list every year. Using a random starting point and choosing every *n*th name, a sample that may be

described as a systematic sample proportional to the population of each precinct in the town was chosen for each community. The samples are systematic if one assumes that no statistical bias is introduced by the arrangement of names in the list by street within each precinct, by number on each street, and by name of those residing at each number.

Samples were selected in May of 1968 and interviews were carried out in the period from May to September of that year. Between four and eight months elapsed from the time the list was compiled to the time an initial attempt was made to interview a subject. In each sample about one in ten of the original sample of 200 subjects could not be interviewed due to this time lag, either because he had moved or because he had died.

There was also some loss of subjects among those who could be located. In the suburban sample, which was comprised of middle-class, white-collar, well educated individuals of various ethnic backgrounds, 16.0% of the sample gave outright refusals to be interviewed. A number of these refusals came from persons of high socioeconomic background, such as doctors and lawyers, who refused to complete an interview because they felt their time was too valuable to spend in answering questions. Such outright refusals may also have come from subjects who had participated in other studies conducted in the community by neighboring universities. The outright refusals did not bias the sample of completed interviews by either sex or age. A small amount of systematic bias, under-representing the elderly slightly, was introduced by the inability to interview some subjects because of infirmity due to age (one lady was 93) or because of serious illness. There was no attrition in the suburban sample because of a lack of fluency in English. One hundred thirty-eight interviews were completed in the suburban community.

Most of the 128 subjects interviewed in the urban area were working class, blue-collar, not especially well educated, and of Italian descent. Eleven percent refused to be interviewed, some because of general suspiciousness about surveys and others because they were unable to comprehend why anyone would want their views on anything. At least two of the outright refusals were by persons who had relatives in trouble with the law and did not want to speak with any stranger. No biases by sex or age resulted from these outright refusals. There was a slight under-representation of the elderly introduced by the inability

of 5% of the original sample to complete interviews because of infirmity or illness and by the failure of 6.5% of the sample to complete interviews because of lack of fluency in English.

The interview and self-administered Likert-item battery took about 45 minutes to complete, an amount of time that did not seem excessive to the respondents. The two samples of completed interviews were representative of the original samples of 200 residents from each area in terms of age and sex, with the exception of slight under-representation of the elderly in each sample.

The Criminal Environment: Local Crime Rates

A comprehensive examination of the criminal environment would require a study of public attitudes, experiences with crime, exposure to crime news, local history, conversations about crime, and a number of other topics. This section will focus on differences in official crime rates between the two communities and on residents' perceptions of local crime rates. The following section will deal with personal views of the local crime problem and with actual experiences with crime.

Before looking at perceptions of local crime rates, a comparison of official rates in the two areas will prove instructive. The Crime Index of the Federal Bureau of Investigation sums in an unweighted fashion the number of the following types of incidents which are recorded by the police: murder, rape, aggravated assault, robbery, burglary, larceny over $50, and auto theft. Such criminal statistics are of course subject to numerous criticisms, including the under-reporting and under-recording of actual incidents of crime and the summation of crimes of differential seriousness in an unweighted manner. In spite of these and other shortcomings, F.B.I. statistics probably give a rough picture of crime that occurs in a community.

Table 1 shows the average crime rate per 100,000 population for the three-year period immediately preceding the study (1965-1967) for each community, for the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area in which the two communities are located, and for the nation as a whole.

TABLE 1: AVERAGE CRIME RATES PER 100,000 FOR 1965-1967

Crime	*United States*	*Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area*	*Suburb*	*Urban Area*
Murder	5.6	2.9	0.0	2.5
Rape	12.8	6.5	1.2	5.9
Robbery	83.3	59.1	2.3	44.4
Aggravated assault	118.6	61.7	11.6	78.7
Burglary	718.1	609.7	439.9	686.9
Larceny over $50	464.9	369.2	280.2	207.7
Auto theft	289.9	724.6	97.2	1424.1
Crimes against persons	220.3	130.2	15.1	131.5
Crimes against property	1472.9	1703.5	817.3	2318.7
Total crime rate	1693.2	1833.7	832.4	2450.2

Three-year averages were used because there were too few cases of some crimes (e.g., murder and rape) and too small a population in each community for rates to have stability over a one-year period. The rate of crimes against persons is about *nine* times as high in the urban area as in the suburb, but the rate of crimes against property is only about *three* times as high. Rates of property offenses would be even more similar if the high auto theft rate in the urban area were discounted to allow for thefts from car rental agencies and public parking lots in the area. The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (1968: 267) also found that rates of property crimes varied less from one community to another than did rates of crimes against persons.

The large difference in official crime rates for the two areas is the first piece of evidence that the two communities have dissimilar criminal environments. However, the definition of criminal environment stresses the role of crime in the social environment of the community, suggesting that perception of local crime rates is even more important than the magnitude of official rates. If residents are unaware of crime in their community, it cannot be said to be a salient aspect of their social environment. Rather than try to assess such perceptions by asking about the actual size of the local crime rates, subjects were asked to compare local rates with rates of other jurisdictions, particularly the metropolitan area as a whole and the nation as a whole. Subjects were also asked to describe local rates as high, average, or low.

When asked to compare the rate in their area with that of the metropolitan area, 83.2% of the suburban sample but only 39.1% of the urban sample stated that the rate in their community was lower. More than nine out of ten (90.7%) of the

suburban respondents felt that their community had a rate lower than that of the nation as a whole, but only 56.6% of the urban subjects felt that way. While 87.4% of the subjects living in the suburb described their crime rate as low, only 53.3% of the urban residents described local rates in that way. All three of these differences are significant beyond the .001 level. The correlations between pairs of the items were moderate (between .34 and .49) but significant at the .01 level. The three items were summed to form a scale, the difference between sample means being significant beyond the .001 level.

Table 2 shows that the difference between sample means on the perception of crime scale still obtains when the same categories of a number of control variables are compared across

TABLE 2: MEAN VALUES ON PERCEPTION OF CRIME SCALE*

	Suburb	*Urban area*
Sample Mean	2.86(124)	2.37 (105)
Age		
Young	2.84 (42)	2.23 (35)
Middle	2.83 (49)	2.50 (46)
Old	2.92 (33)	2.31 (24)
Sex		
Male	2.85 (60)	2.39 (52)
Female	2.87 (64)	2.35 (53)
Ethnic Group		
Italian	2.81 (21)	2.37 (76)
Irish	2.86 (32)	1.47 (12)
Yankee or English	2.83 (35)	2.00 (4)
Religion		
Catholic	2.85 (62)	2.37 (98)
Protestant	2.82 (32)	2.00 (4)
Education		
Less than high school	2.85 (13)	2.46 (52)
Complete high school	2.91 (36)	2.25 (29)
Some college	2.84 (74)	2.29 (24)
Income		
Low	2.84 (30)	2.42 (39)
Medium	2.91 (26)	2.44 (39)
High	2.82 (54)	2.15 (18)
Prestige		
Low	2.85 (56)	2.35 (79)
Medium	2.81 (27)	2.46 (19)
High	2.89 (40)	2.29 (7)
Self-designated class		
Working class	2.85 (34)	2.43 (61)
Middle-class	2.86 (86)	2.33 (42)
Father's occupation		
Working class	2.89 (58)	2.38 (89)
Middle-class	2.84 (63)	2.27 (16)

* The mean values on the scale were the sum of the three items divided by the number of items in the scale (3) to obtain a value from 1 (much crime perceived) to 3 (little crime perceived).

samples. Differences between categories of the control variables *within* each sample for the most part show negligible differences in perception of crime. The greater amount of crime which is perceived in the urban area than in the suburb thus

seems to reflect a difference in the criminal environments of the two communities, even if individuals of similar social characteristics in each sample are compared.[1]

The Criminal Environment: The Salience of Crime

Certainly the rate of crime in a community and the perception of that rate by residents of the community do not exhaust the meaning of criminal environment as the term was used earlier. The role of crime in the social environment also includes direct and indirect experience with crime, exposure to crime news, awareness of local traditions and legends regarding crime, and relations with local police and local criminals. Rather than explore the innumerable manifestations of criminal environment, a selected group of measures will be examined in this section which bear on personal experiences with crime and attitudes toward the crime problem.

In a general way, the urban sample is more concerned with crime as a social problem than is the suburban sample. When asked to select the problem of greatest importance to them from a list of seven social problems,[2] the urban respondents picked crime as either first or second in importance in 37.5% of the cases, while the suburban subjects named crime first or second only 25.3% of that time, a difference between samples that is significant beyond the .05 level.

Not only do urban residents feel that crime is a more serious problem than do suburban residents, but the subjects who live in the city are more apt to feel that those individuals who do commit crime in the area also live in the area. In other words, they perceive crime to be an indigenous problem, while the residents of the suburb see crime as an act perpetrated by intruders into their community. About one in three (32.0%) of the urban residents felt that most persons who committed crime in the area also lived in the area, but only one in five (19.6%) of the suburban subjects blamed local crime on residents of the area. This difference is significant beyond the .05 level. In part, these assessments of the origins of criminals may be accurate, for the urban community is nearly an island and it is unlikely that potential criminals will just be passing through the community. Also, access to the suburb is quite easy and numerous targets for burglary are present there to attract outside criminals. Nevertheless, the criminal environment of the urban community does include a greater perception of threat from residents of the area and thus crime is a more salient aspect of the social environment of residents of that community.

So far it has been shown that crime is a more salient aspect of the social environment for urban residents than for suburban residents on three measures—perceived crime rates, significance of crime as a social problem, and perceived origin of criminals. Since all of these indicators deal with crime as a general category, a question was asked to determine what residents of each area felt was the *most serious* type of crime in their community. The problem most often mentioned by the urban subjects was drug abuse. Nearly two out of three (65.4%) of the subjects cited narcotics offenses as of greatest importance for the community. Official data show that this community had one of the highest rates of narcotics arrests of any community in the metropolitan area in the years preceding the survey. Some subjects who expressed concern with other types of crimes mentioned that addicts were often responsible for them. A number of respondents mentioned specific corners where addicts could be found. In contrast to this great concern over narcotics offenses, only 8.7% of the sample cited burglary as the most serious crime in the area and only 3.2% mentioned juvenile delinquency.

When suburban residents were asked to name the most serious crime in their community, more than two out of five (41.6%) mentioned juvenile delinquency, including vandalism, under-age drinking, and rowdyism. Only 3.7% mentioned narcotics offenses. About one in four (27.7%) felt that burglary was the most serious crime problem in the community. F.B.I. data (see Table 1) are consistent with this assessment, showing that burglary offenses constitute more than half of the offenses included in the Crime Index for the three years prior to the study. However, it should be kept in mind that while more of the suburban residents showed concern over burglary than did urban residents, the official rate for burglary incidents in the suburb is only two-thirds as great as it is in the urban community.

With the exception of the substantial number of suburban residents who mentioned burglary as the most serious local crime, the urban residents were more concerned with offenses that may be classified as "serious." If "serious crimes" are defined as those included in the F.B.I. Crime Index plus arson, "loan-sharking," and narcotics offenses, then 96.4% of the crimes mentioned by urban residents would be classified as "serious," while only 44.3% of the crimes mentioned by suburban residents would be called "serious." This difference is significant beyond the .001 level.

Another aspect of the criminal environment of each community is organized crime, a type of crime not mentioned very often by subjects. No one in the suburban sample mentioned any knowledge of gangsters, book-makers, "loan-sharks," or "fences" in the area, but a few of the urban respondents did know of such individuals in their community. Other sources of evidence suggest that organized crime activities are a more salient aspect of the social environment of the urban residents than is the case for suburban residents. The body of a victim in a gangland killing was found in the urban community not long before the survey was conducted. A convicted leader in organized crime was known by a number of subjects to have lived in the area and to have frequented a bar there. A police detective interviewed in a different study mentioned that a number of organized criminals carried on activities in the community, but that their activities rarely came to public attention because local residents "kept it to themselves." Heroin addicts interviewed in yet another study commented on the ease with which they were able to "fence" stolen goods in the urban area, often to people who were also engaged in gambling activities. Different types of evidence point to the greater salience of organized crime for urban residents than for suburban residents, although neither group discussed it in much detail.

There was little difference between samples in direct victimization by criminals, although official crime rates suggest that such a difference should appear. The urban sample had a slightly higher rate of victimization if only Crime Index offenses are examined, but the difference was less than expected. The similarity in rates of victimization is probably due in part to the small number of offenses reported in interviews, a fact related to the relatively small size of the two samples. In part the lack of difference in victimization rates is also due to lack of detail in probing subjects about their experiences as victims. Research by the National Crime Commission indicated that many detailed questions were needed to assess victimization accurately. Since actual victimization was not the major topic of interest in this study, such detail was avoided, although at the expense of having a valid measure of victimization.

In summary, a number of differences exist between samples in the salience of crime in the social environment. Crime is a more salient aspect of the social environment of the urban residents, whether the measure used to test salience is the official crime rate, perception of the local crime rate, perception of

where persons committing local crimes reside, view of seriousness of the crime problem relative to other social problems, or the seriousness of the crime of greatest concern to local residents. Other data from this study (see Conklin, 1971) indicate that the urban residents feel less safe in their community, are less trusting of others, and have less positive affect for their community than the residents of the suburb. These findings are contradicted by a study of response to crime in Baltimore (Rosenthal, 1969), which found that fear of crime was more intense in the suburbs than in the central city. Although a full explanation of this contradiction would require comparable data and careful consideration of local conditions in Boston and Baltimore, some of the differences may be due to the nature of the questions asked the respondents in the two cities. The Baltimore study tested concern about being the victim of a crime, while this study examined salience of crime in the community and the impact of perceptions of crime on specific attitudes and types of behavior. It is possible that the Baltimore study tapped a more intellectualized concern with crime, as is suggested by its finding that concern with crime varied positively with educational level. This study of Boston communities sought a more concrete reaction to crime in the community. As can be seen from Table 2, there was little relationship between perception of crime and education in this study, although there was a significant difference between communities in perception of crime rates.

Now that it has been established that there are a number of ways in which the role of crime in the urban residents' social environment is greater than it is in the environment of the suburban residents, it is possible to examine the degree of support for the law in each community and to relate support for the law to the role of crime in the environment.

Support for the Law

Support for the law can be measured in a number of ways. One can test verbal agreement with existing laws, the reporting of crime to the police, or actual intervention in a crime which one observes in progress. This section will measure support for the law in three ways: attitude toward violation of the law in general, agreement with existing laws, and willingness to call the police if aware of a crime. Measures of actual experiences in support of the law—such as reporting a crime or testifying in court—showed that too few subjects in either sample had done such things to make cross-sample comparisons meaningful.

Subjects were asked if there were circumstances under which they felt one might justifiably break the law. There was a substantial difference between samples on this item, with residents of the urban area being more adamantly opposed to any violation of the law than were residents of the suburb. However, when a control for authoritarianism was used,[3] this difference between samples washed out. At each level of authoritarianism, there was no significant difference between samples on attitude toward law violation in general. Because there were more highly authoritarian subjects in the urban sample than in the suburban sample, a substantial difference appeared to exist between samples if no control for authoritarianism was used.

Because the question about law violation tapped a predisposition to obedience as well as attitudes toward the law itself, specific questions about the following 13 types of criminal behavior were asked as indicators of support for the law.

1. A man takes bets for horse races in a downtown office. (Gambling)
2. An unarmed man breaks into an unoccupied house at night and steals $100.00 in cash. (Burglary)
3. A man buys and uses marijuana. (Marijuana use)
4. A man enters a bar, says he is going to kill another man, and attacks this man with a knife. He doesn't kill him, but he injures him seriously. (Aggravated assault)
5. A man picks the pocket of another man and takes a wallet containing $100.00. (Larceny)
6. A woman kills her husband by putting poison in his food. (Murder [poison])
7. A college student with a group of other students takes control of a university building as a means of protesting university policies. (Trespass [protest])
8. A man steals a car that he finds parked on the street. (Auto theft)
9. A man forcibly rapes a woman. (Rape)
10. A bank manager steals $100.00 from the vault in the bank in which he works. (Embezzlement)
11. A man gets drunk at a bar and has an accident while driving home, killing another person in the accident. (Manslaughter)
12. A man holds up another man with a gun and takes $100.00 from him. (Robbery)
13. A leader in organized crime pays to have a leader of a rival gang killed. (Murder [gang])

The first two columns of Table 3 show the percentages of each sample answering affirmatively to the following ques-

tion: "In your opinion, should there be a law to punish this person?" It can be seen that there is nearly perfect agreement

TABLE 3: ATTITUDES TOWARD THIRTEEN CRIMES

Crime	% Favoring Law			% Willing to Report		
	Suburb	Urban Area	Suburb Rank	Urban Area	Rank	
*Rape	100.0%	99.2%	90.6%	2	86.7%	1
Manslaughter	98.6%	95.3%	90.6%	2	83.6%	2
*Robbery	100.0%	99.2%	89.1%	4	81.3%	3
*Auto theft	100.0%	98.4%	90.6%	2	80.5%	4
*Murder (poison)	99.3%	97.7%	86.2%	7	79.7%	5
*Aggravated assault	100.0%	99.2%	87.0%	6	71.9%	6
*Larceny from person	98.6%	98.4%	81.9%	8	70.3%	7
*Burglary	100.0%	100.0%	88.4%	5	67.2%	8
*Murder (gang)	99.3%	95.3%	76.1%	9	60.9%	9
Embezzlement	94.2%	89.1%	68.1%	10	56.3%	10
Marijuana use	71.0%	77.3%	40.6%	11	54.7%	11
Trespass (protest)	69.6%	62.5%	39.1%	12	39.8%	12
Gambling	44.9%	31.3%	13.0%	13	7.8%	13

* One of crimes in Federal Bureau of Investigation Crime Index.

between residents of the two communities that the law should punish those offenses included in the F.B.I. Crime Index, as well as the offense of manslaughter. Only for the offense of gambling was there substantial difference between samples as to whether a law should exist to punish such behavior.

It is possible that the question about whether there should be a law to punish a type of behavior which most people already know is illegal does not go far enough in eliciting support for the law. For this reason, subjects were also asked: "If you knew someone had done this thing, would you report it to the police?" Responses to this are presented in the third and fifth columns of Table 3. Probably *fewer* respondents would actually report a crime to the police if faced with the choice of doing so than said they would report the crime to the police. On the other hand, very few persons who stated that they would *not* report the crime to the police would *actually* report it if they knew about it. In other words, the percentage expressing willingness to report crimes to the police probably represents the *maximum* number who would *actually* report the crime if faced with the real situation.

While there is consensus between samples on the desirability of laws to prohibit and punish most of the types of behavior asked about, there is less than complete agreement

on whether one should report such behavior to the police. Although residents of both communities agree that laws should exist to punish persons for committing Crime Index offenses, for *all* such crimes the residents of the urban community where crime is a salient aspect of the environment are *less* willing to call police. For the eight examples of Crime Index offenses included in the interview, the mean percentage of the urban sample expressing willingness to report the offenses was 74.8%, while the mean for the suburban sample was 86.0%. On the other five items, the sample from the urban community was less willing to call the police on three (manslaughter, embezzlement, and gambling), about as willing to call on one (trespass), and more willing to call on one (marijuana use).[4]

The number of crimes a subject was willing to report formed an index of willingness to support the law. The cross-sample difference on this index was significant beyond the .01 level, the urban sample being less inclined to report crimes to the police. In neither sample was there a significant relationship between this index and the authoritarianism scale, suggesting that this index avoids the problem of tapping a predisposition to obedience which was encountered in the attempt to measure support for the law with one general question. Not only does the cross-sample difference in willingness to report crimes hold up when various levels of authoritarianism are compared, but the cross-sample differences in most cases are in the same direction and in a large number of cases statistically significant when the social background variables are used as controls. Table 4 shows the mean number of crimes which subjects in each sample of various background characteristics are willing to report to the police, as well as the number of subjects in each category.

TABLE 4: MEAN NUMBER OF CRIMES WILLING TO REPORT

	Suburb	*Urban area*
Sample Mean	9.41(138)	8.41(128)
Age		
Young	9.77 (44)	9.05 (41)
Middle	9.46 (56)	8.38 (56)
Old	8.92 (38)	7.61 (31)
Sex		
Male	9.55 (65)	8.71 (62)
Female	9.29 (73)	8.12 (66)
Ethnic group		
Italian	9.52 (23)	8.24 (93)
Irish	9.23 (35)	9.33 (15)
Yankee or English	10.08 (39)	10.00 (5)
Religion		
Catholic	9.28 (69)	8.43 (120)
Protestant	9.86 (37)	7.50 (4)
Education		
Less than high school	8.88 (16)	8.23 (66)
Complete high school	9.62 (39)	8.11 (35)
Some college	9.46 (82)	9.22 (27)
Income		
Low	9.53 (32)	8.71 (48)
Medium	9.25 (28)	8.85 (46)
High	9.67 (61)	9.00 (19)
Prestige		
Low	9.37 (63)	8.28 (97)
Medium	10.06 (31)	8.57 (23)
High	9.23 (43)	9.50 (8)
Self-designated class		
Working class	9.34 (38)	8.18 (76)
Middle-class	9.42 (96)	8.80 (50)
Father's occupation		
Working class	9.19 (62)	8.52 (108)
Middle-class	9.64 (73)	7.58 (19)

There is thus a substantial difference between samples in support for the law, as measured by an index of expressed willingness to report violations to the police. Interestingly, this difference is one of support for the law rather than one of perceived differences in the *relative* seriousness of different offenses. When crimes are ranked by the precentage of each sample expressing willingness to report the crime (see the fourth and sixth columns of Table 3), the Spearman rank-order correlation between samples is a very high .95. This is consistent with Sellin and Wolfgang's (1964: 268) finding that different groups order crimes by seriousness in similar ways. However, their research used primarily middle-class "judges" (college students, police officers, and juvenile court justices) to rank offenses, while this study shows that even for samples of dissimilar social backgrounds the ranking of crimes by seriousness is nearly the same.

In summary, the community in which residents perceive more crime is the area in which there is less support for the law, as measured by expressed willingness to call the police to report a crime. For the two communities tested, there is thus

an inverse relationship between perception of crime and support for the law: *the more salient crime is, the less support there is for the law.*

Criminal Environment and Support for the Law

This inverse relationship between criminal environment and support for the law must also be examined for the subjects *within* each community. Table 5 shows that for those subjects for whom data are available there is a relationship between perception of crime in the community and support for the law that is in the expected direction but not statistically significant for both samples.[5] In both the suburb and the urban area those

TABLE 5: PERCEPTION OF CRIME AND WILLINGNESS TO REPORT CRIME TO THE POLICE

Number of items indicating high perception of crime	*Mean Number of Crimes Willing to Report*	
	Suburb	*Urban area*
0-1	9.98 (41)	9.34 (32)
2	9.62 (47)	9.30 (43)
3-4	9.50 (12)	8.86 (22)
TOTAL	9.75 (100)	9.22 (97)

subjects who see crime as a more salient aspect of their social environment are the ones who are slightly less inclined to report crime to the police. This relationship might have been stronger if there had been an even sharper contrast between communities in criminal environment or if larger samples had permitted the use of control variables.

The relationship between support for the law and criminal environment at the community level and to a lesser extent at the individual level can be viewed as arising in a number of different ways. First of all, salience of crime in the social environment may be a causal factor and unwillingness to support the law an effect. While one reaction to a local crime problem may be to try to assist law enforcement agents in reducing the problem, another reaction may be to be paralyzed by fear of crime and to retreat from responsibility for the prevention and reduction of crime. The threat that crime represents to the public, coupled with the existence of an established social control agency for dealing with crime (the police), makes it possible for people in a high crime rate area to absolve themselves of responsibility for crime in the community and to assign to the police complete control over the problem. Subjects in each sample were asked to respond to the following item: "Prevent-

ing crime is the job of the police, not the job of the average citizen." Two out of five urban subjects (39.8%) and fewer than one out of five suburban subjects (17.5%) agreed with this statement, a difference significant beyond the .01 level. Thus one explanation for lower support for the law in the high crime rate urban area is that residents are more apt to assign full responsibility for crime prevention to the police, even to the point of being unwilling to report crimes to the police. Denial of responsibility for crime prevention on the part of residents of the high crime rate area is consistent with the finding presented earlier that residents of that community feel that the crimes which occur in their area are of a more threatening and serious nature than is the case in the low crime rate suburb.

A second way to explain the relationship between support for the law and criminal environment is to view support for the law as a causal factor and salience of crime as an effect, with actual amount of crime being an intervening variable. This type of explanation is implicit in the "theory of differential association" developed by Sutherland and Cressey (1970: 75-77), with failure to punish, report, or otherwise sanction behavior constituting a "definition favorable to violation of the law." Durkheim (1933: 102-110) formulates a special case of this, stating that by the punishment of certain types of behavior the sentiments of a community about accepted social behavior are transmitted to the members of the community. Both theories suggest that lack of support for the law will produce an increase in the type of behavior defined as criminal, since the absence of negative sanctions for such behavior will be interpreted as a "definition favorable to violation of the law." In this way the unwillingness to report crime can result in more criminal behavior and thus make crime a more salient aspect of the social environment.

A third way to explain the relationship between criminal environment and support for the law is to look for a third variable which is related to both. One such variable will be briefly examined here, that of "trouble" as discussed by Miller (1958). "Trouble" as a focal concern implies shallow commitment to legal norms and compliance with those norms primarily to avoid "the complicating consequences of the action" (Miller, 1958: 8). Where such a focal concern exists, restraints to avoid law-violating behavior will be weaker and the probability of criminal behavior will be greater. Such behavior will in turn

have an impact on the criminal environment, increasing the salience of crime in the daily life of residents of the community. Not only can "trouble" have an impact on the criminal environment, but it can also have an effect on support for law. In a subculture where "trouble" is a focal concern, individuals are apt to feel that *any* involvement with the law, whether as a defendant or as a witness, should be avoided as a type of "trouble." They may feel that reporting crime will cause "trouble" in the form of reprisals, that assisting the police will cause "trouble" in the shape of hostile reactions from friends and relatives, and that testifying in court will cause "trouble" in the sense of having to answer difficult questions asked by lawyers and judges. "Trouble" as a focal concern can thus act to reduce support for the law, at the same time that it acts to increase the salience of crime in the environment.[6]

Probably all three of these explanations of the inverse relationship betwen salience of crime and support for the law have some merit. It is plausible that if crime is a perceived threat, one reaction might be to assign full responsibility for dealing with that problem to the existing control agency, the police. It is equally possible that an unwillingness to support the law will lead to more crime in the area and thus to a greater salience of crime in the social environment. A number of underlying variables might also explain the inverse relationship between perception of crime and support for the law, among them being the concept of "trouble" as elaborated by Miller.

Summary

A number of measures of the criminal environments of two communities demonstrated that the sample living in the area with the higher official crime rate was *more* concerned about the local crime problem than was the sample from the low crime rate suburb. Support for the law, measured by the number of crimes a subject expressed a willingness to report to the police, also showed a significant cross-sample difference, with the residents of the high crime rate urban area being *less* willing to call the police. This inverse relationship between criminal environment and support for the law was also tested within each sample, and it was found that while the relationship was not statistically significant for either sample, it was in the direction expected—the more crime perceived, the less support for the law.

Three explanations for this relationship were explored, all of which probably have value in explaining the inverse relationship between criminal environment and support for the law. Salience of crime may lead to a reduction of support for the law. However, lack of support for the law can also increase the amount of crime in a community, thus increasing salience of crime to residents of the area. Both perception of crime and support for the law can be affected by a third variable. The focal concern of "trouble" was examined as a variable that might reduce support for the law at the same time that it increased the amount and perception of crime in the community.

FOOTNOTES

[1] A scale to measure alienation was formed by summing eight items Although there were more highly alienated subjects in the urban sample than in the suburban sample, at each of three levels of alienation the urban subjects perceived more crime in their community than did the suburban subjects.

[2] The seven problems were poverty, rising prices, Vietnam War, education, crime, race relations, and unemployment.

[3] An authoritarianism scale was formed by summing responses to five items developed in T. W. Adorno et al. (1950). The items, which were significantly inter-correlated with each other, were:

a. Human nature being what it is, there will always be war and conflict.

b. He is, indeed, contemptible who does not feel an undying love, gratitude, and respect for his parents.

c. Every person should have a deep faith in some supernatural force higher than himself to which he gives total allegiance and whose decisions he does not question.

d. Sex crimes, such as rape and attacks on children, deserve more than mere imprisonment; such criminals ought to be publicly whipped.

e. Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn.

[4] There are probably a number of reasons that the suburban sample is less willing than the urban sample to report marijuana use, the only one of the thirteen offenses for which this is the case. Residents of the suburb may view marijuana use as adolescent experimentation with a consciousness-altering substance and feel that its use will end with time. They may also define marijuana use as a mental health problem, as a form of behavior requiring therapy and treatment rather than criminal punishment. This would fit with the finding that marijuana use is the only one of the 13 types of behavior which fewer suburban residents than urban residents said should be illegal (see Table 3). In general, suburban residents are likely to see marijuana use as a casual activity of persons who are otherwise non-criminal. In contrast, the residents of the urban community are probably more inclined to see marijuana as "just another drug" used by addicts who commit predatory crimes to support their habits.

[5] Perception of crime is measured here by the total number of items which indicate that crime is a salient issue for the subject. Scores on this measure range from zero to four. A score of four indicates that a subject perceives much crime in his community on the perception of crime scale (see above), that he feels crime is either the first or second most important social problem for him, that he thinks the local crime of greatest importance is a "serious crime" (as defined above), and that he feels that persons who commit crime in the area also live in the area. Data are not available for all subjects on all four items, accounting for the smaller sample sizes in Table 5.

[6] If, in fact, the variable of "trouble" (which was not measured in this study) is operating to reduce support for the law as well as to increase the amount and perception of crime, it may be serving to attenuate the strength of the actual inverse relationship between support for the law and salience of crime. This type of effect of a "suppressor variable" is discussed in Rosenberg (1968: 84-94).

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