



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

# Is the “Crime Drop” the best framework with which to view recent crime trends?

Stephen Farrall and Emily Gray  
Loughborough Univ  
4<sup>th</sup> March 2015



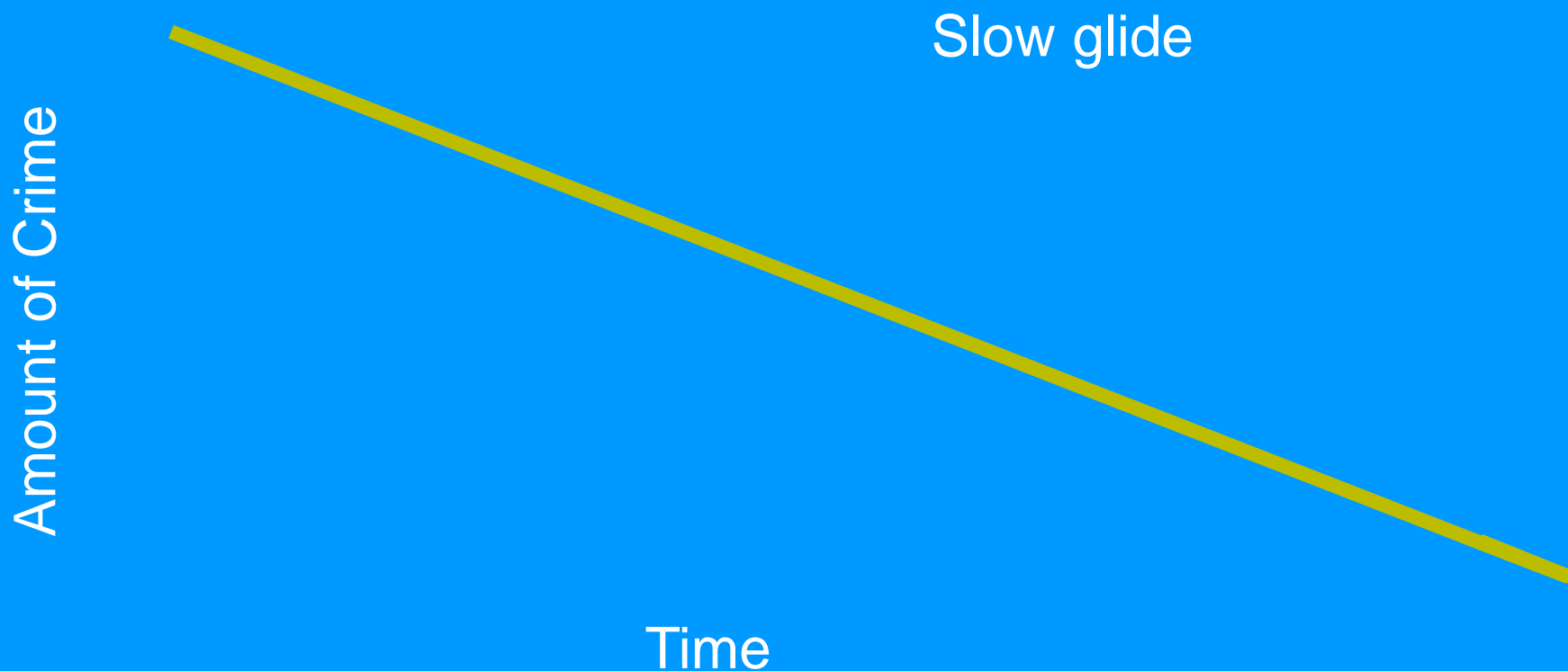
# What is our talk about?

- Not here to dispute the idea of a ‘crime drop’ (but others have questioned this).
- Rather, here to pose an additional causally prior question which has been overlooked.
- Going to explore what that question might mean (and in so doing insert some politics into these debates).
- But first ... what *is* a crime drop?



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

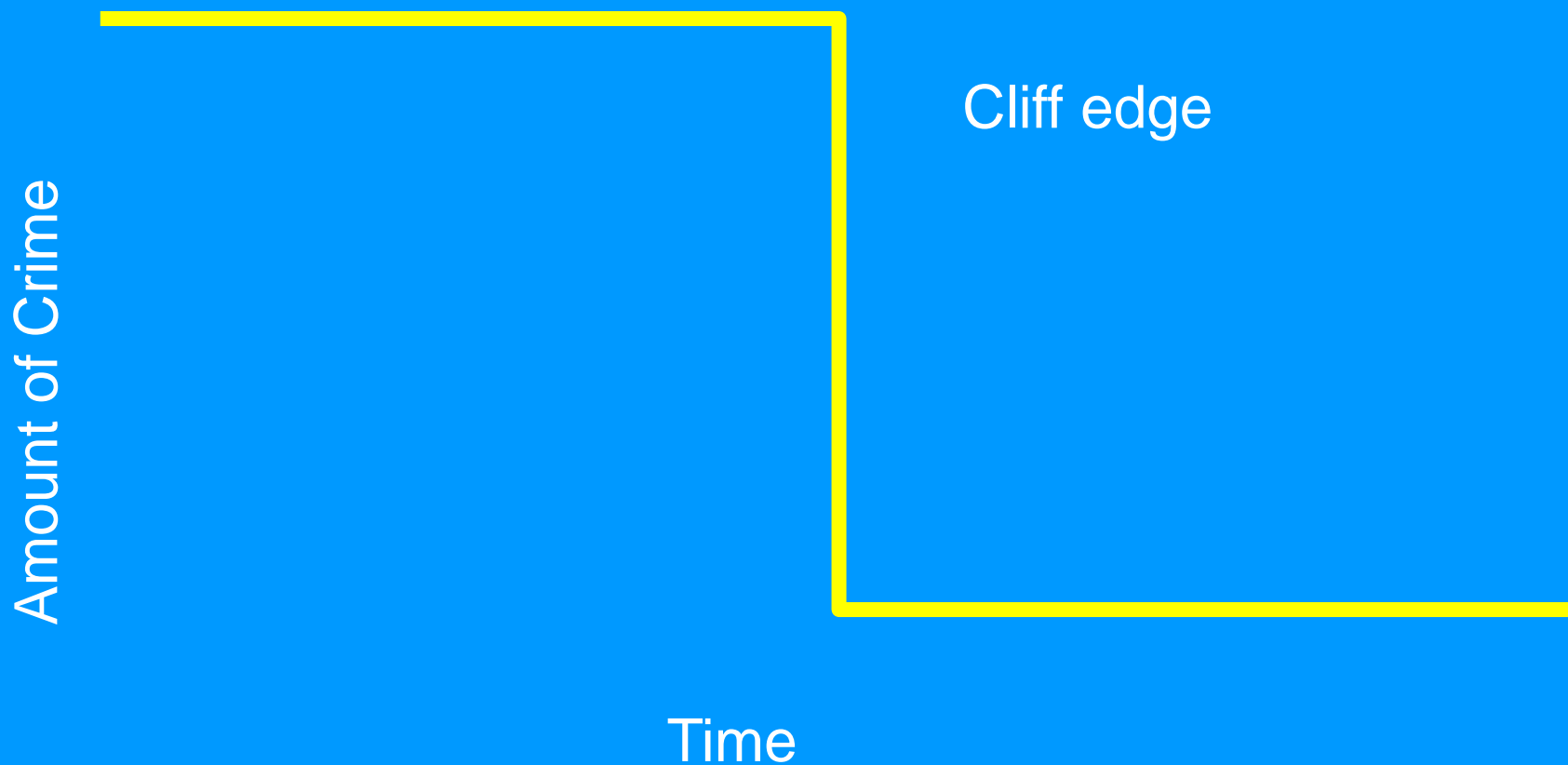
# What does a crime drop look like?





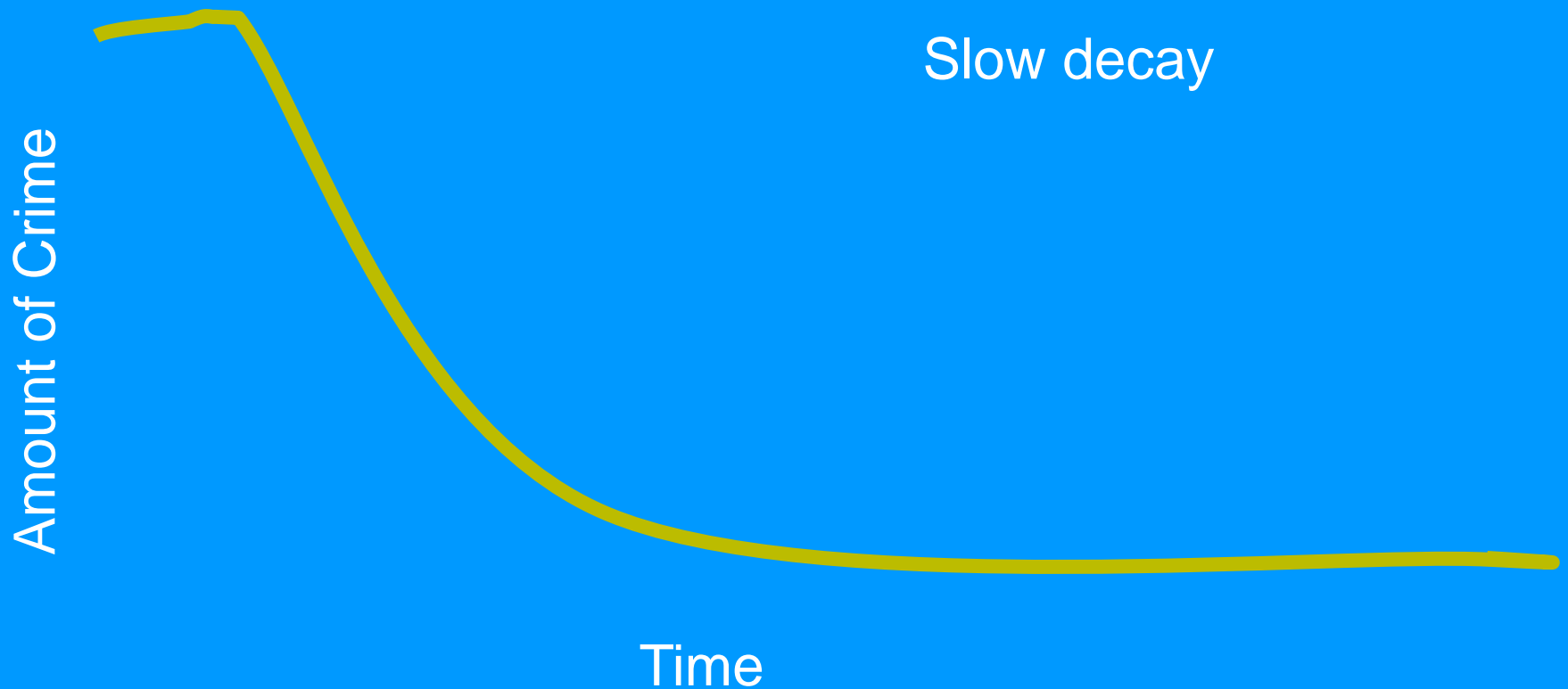
The University Of Sheffield.

# What does a crime drop look like?





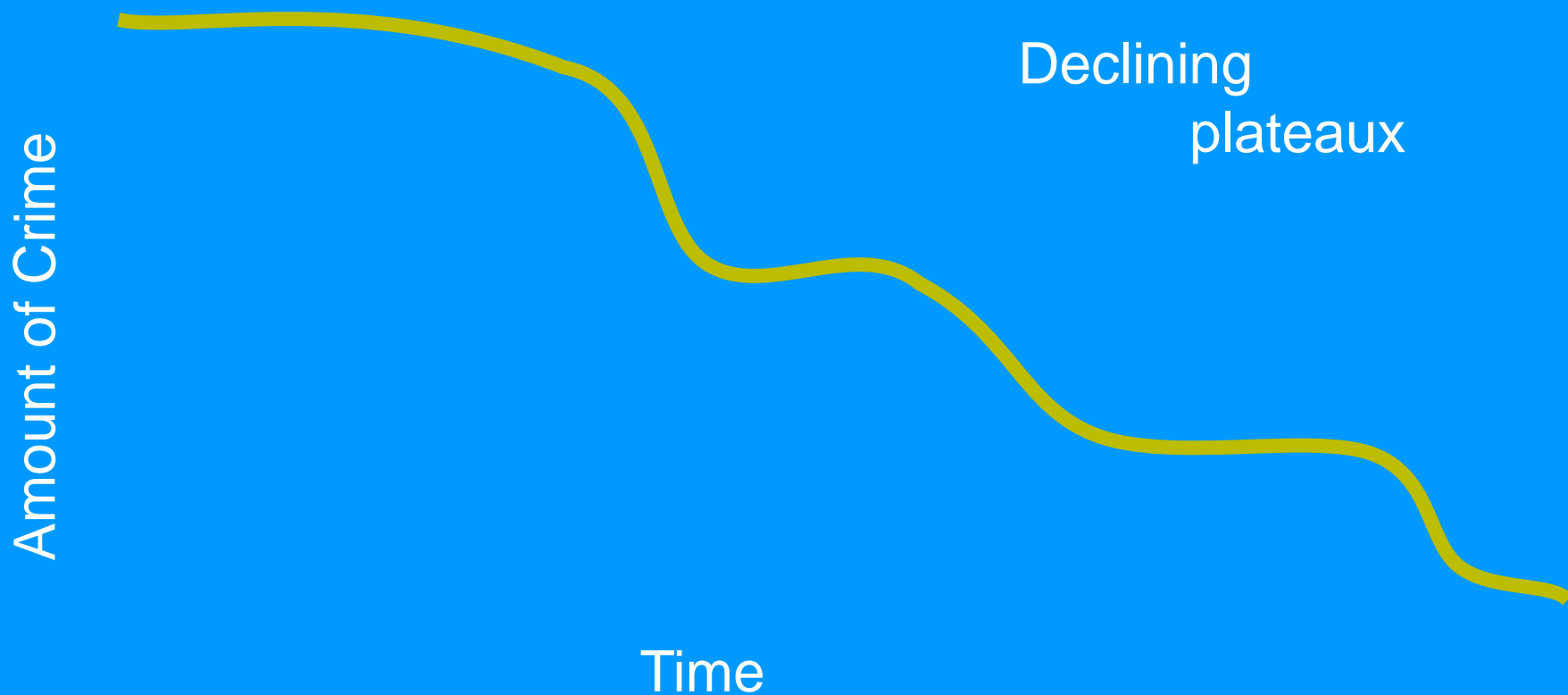
# What does a crime drop look like?





The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

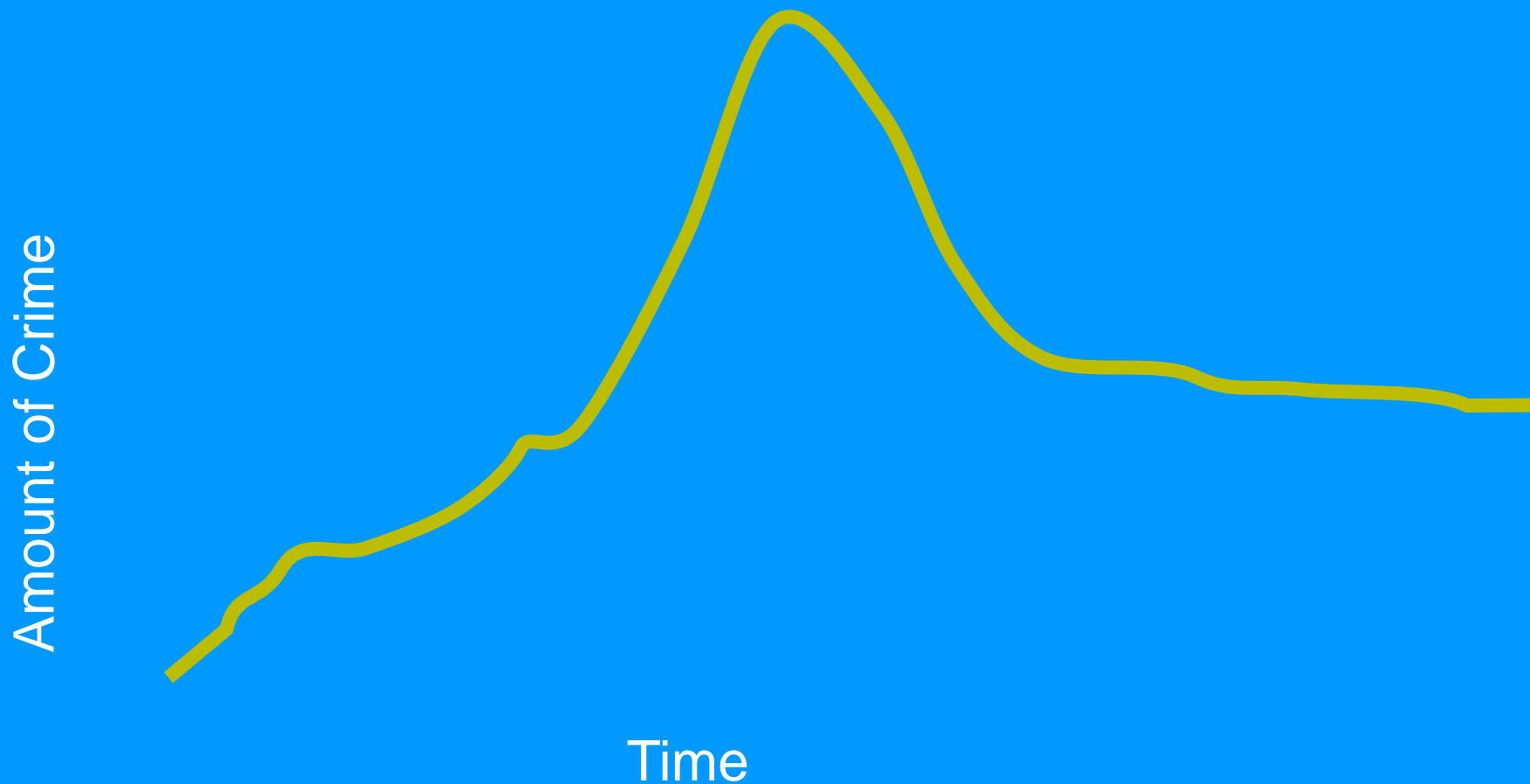
# What does a crime drop look like?



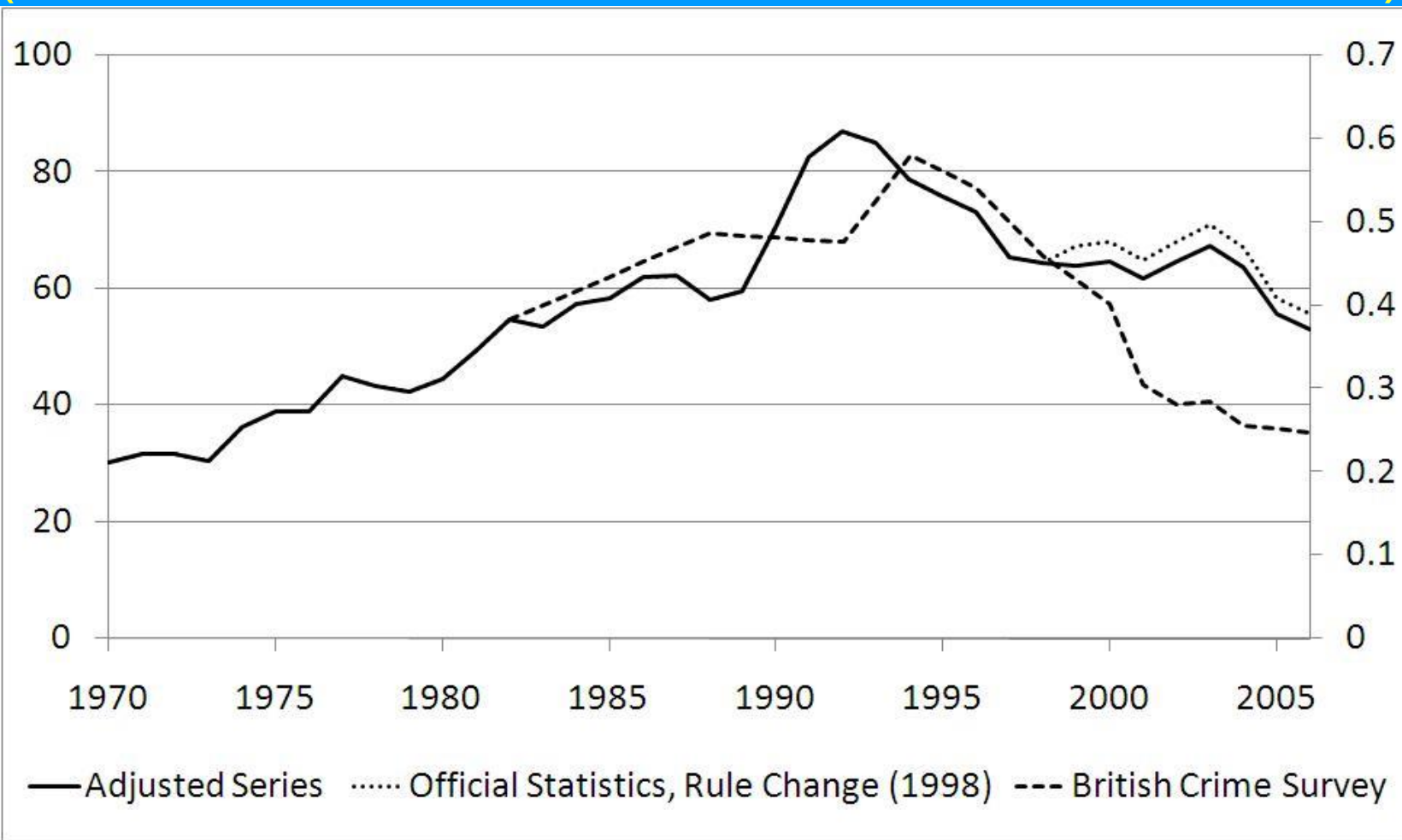


The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

# What did we actually experience?



# E&W Property Crime Per Capita (Home Office Recorded Statistics and BCS)







# So why are we talking about a 'crime drop' *anyway*?

- So crime didn't just *drop*.
- It rose dramatically in E&W and then fell back again?
- This begs two questions:  
Q1: why focus on just the 'drop-y' bit?  
Q2: what explains the rise prior to the drop?



# Answering Q1

A1: Over reliance on the ICVS?

- ICVS ran in 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004-05 and 2010.
- So mainly after the start of the drop-y bit: little data (in ICVS) for thinking about *rises* in crime.
- Problem of ‘left-hand censoring’.

A2: We’ve accepted that rises are ‘natural’?



## Answering Q2

- Several possible answers exist:

A1: Regression to the mean. V. few things 'defy gravity' forever. Why ought crime to be any different?

- But this cannot explain why it went up in the first place ... (other than it randomly went up).



## Answering Q2

A2: Crime related to social and economic changes, so might this help?

- Several of countries which experienced the most dramatic rises and falls went through economic restructuring starting in the 1970s and 1980s.
- E&W; USA; NZ; Australia; Canada.
- Might this shed some light on matters?



# The Rise of The New Right

UK: 'Thatcherism' (1979-1990 - 1997).

Aust': Fraser (75-83) and Hawke (83-89).

Canada: Mulroney (84-93).

USA: 'Reaganomics' (1981-89 – since?)

NZ: 'Rogernomics' (1984-90) 'Ruthanasia'  
(1990-93). (Roger Douglas and Ruth  
Richardson).



# What did this entail?

Economy (monetarism, reductions in taxes, rises in unemployment, deregulation, rises in inequality, privatisation of state businesses, reductions in 'real' wages, deficit reduction a key goal, growth of low pay work, inflation, manufacturing hit hardest),

Housing provision (deregulated, 'sold off', increases in homelessness, concentration of disadvantage),



# What did this entail?

Family formation (divorce increases, isolated nuclear family seen as 'natural'),

Social security (cut, de-indexed, reduced eligibility, discourse around dole cheats, workfare programmes),

Schooling (rises in absenteeism).

Cuts to govt' expenditure. Anti-PWC.



## What did this entail?

CJS: more expenditure on policing; prison building programme; longer sentences; further moves away from 'rehabilitation'; rises in fear of crime; law and order politicised, focus on control.





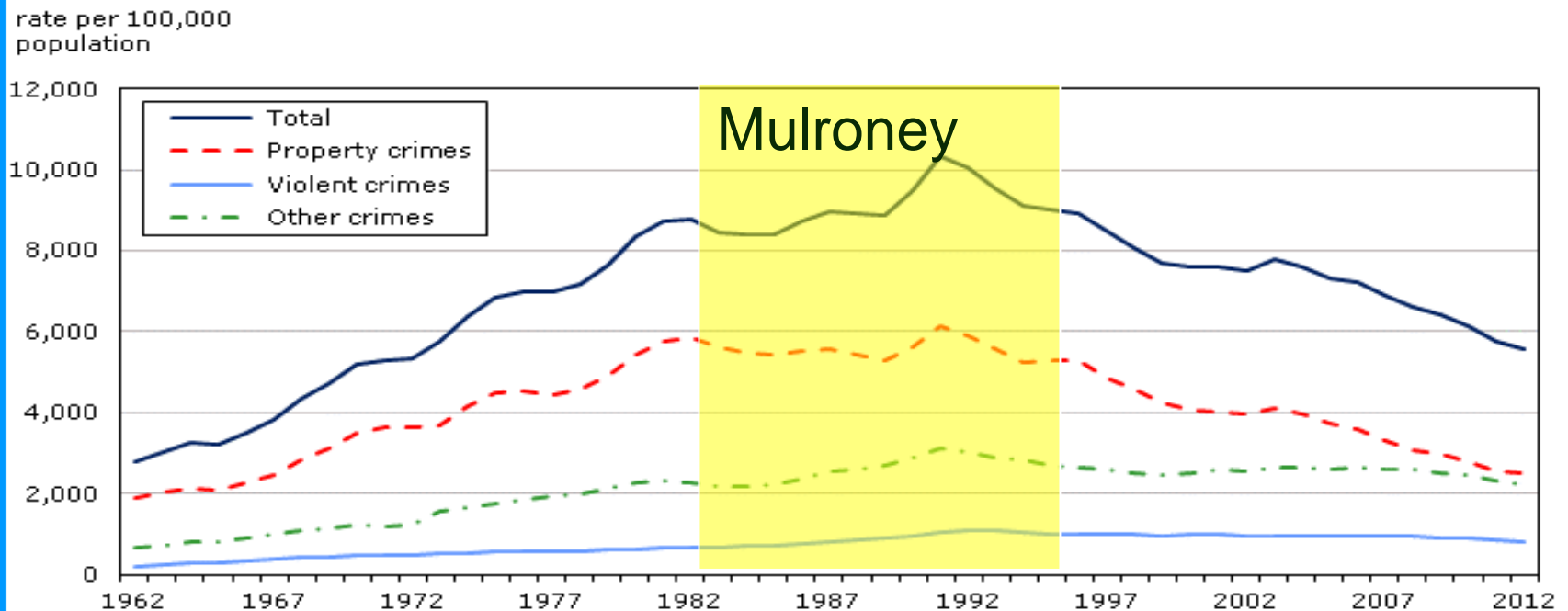
# What did this entail?

- Great deal of exchange of ideas between govts.
- Oliver Letwin advised Canadian Govt; Nigel Lawson used Australian policies to defend UK ones; US tax reforms adopted in Canada; Charles Murray's ideas promoted in US/UK.



# Canadian crime rates 1962-2012

**Chart 1**  
Police-reported crime rates, Canada, 1962 to 2012



**Note:** Information presented in this chart represents data from the UCR Aggregate (UCR1) Survey, and permits historical comparisons back to 1962. New definitions of crime categories were introduced in 2009 and are only available in the new format back to 1998. As a result, numbers in this chart will not match data released in the new UCR2 format. Specifically, the definition of violent crime has been expanded. In addition, UCR1 includes some different offences in the 'Other' crimes category.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.



# New Zealand crime rates

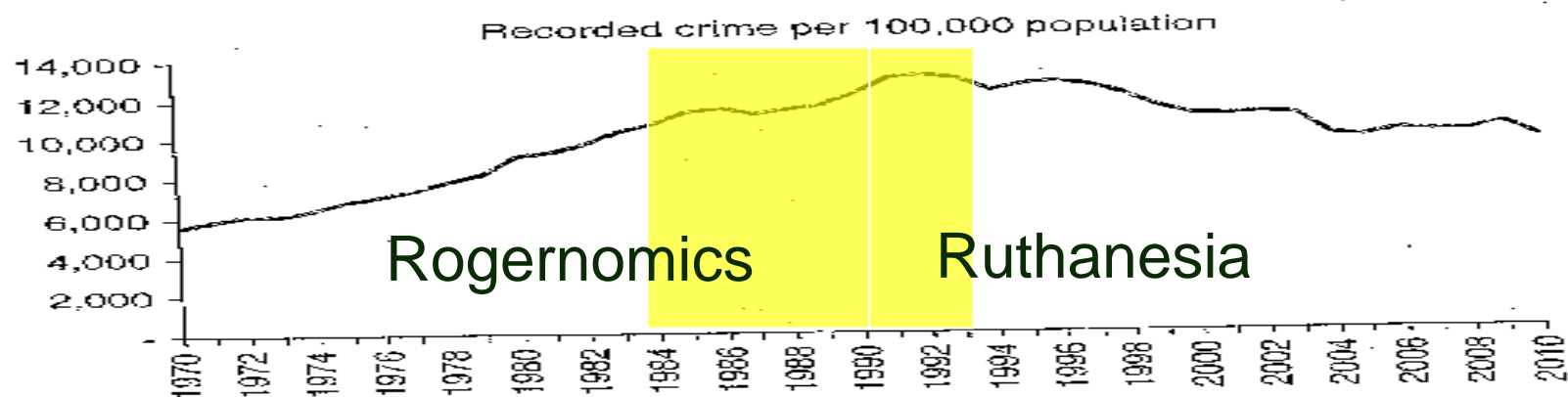
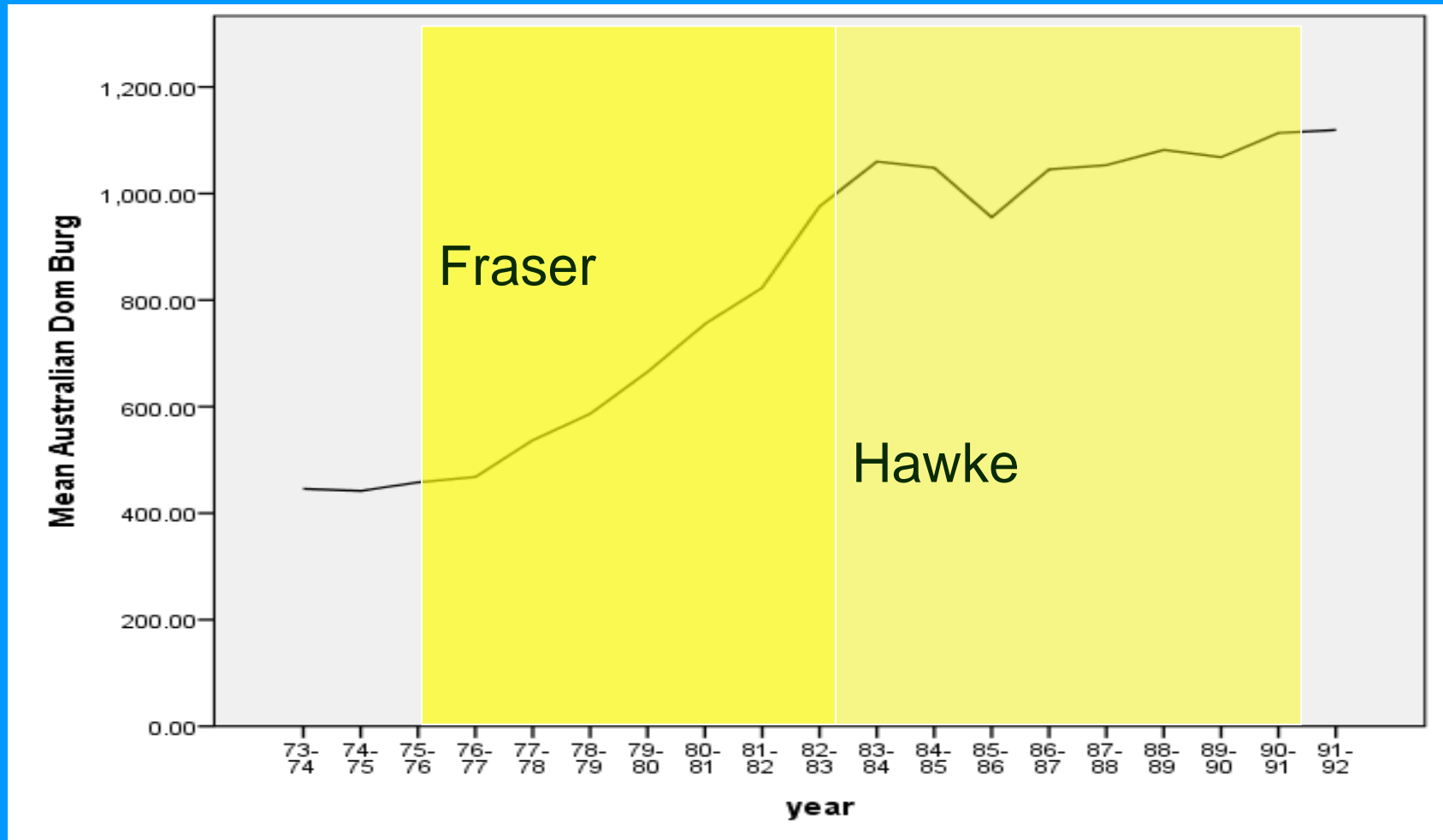


Figure 3.3 Rate of all offences recorded by New Zealand Police: 1970 to 2010



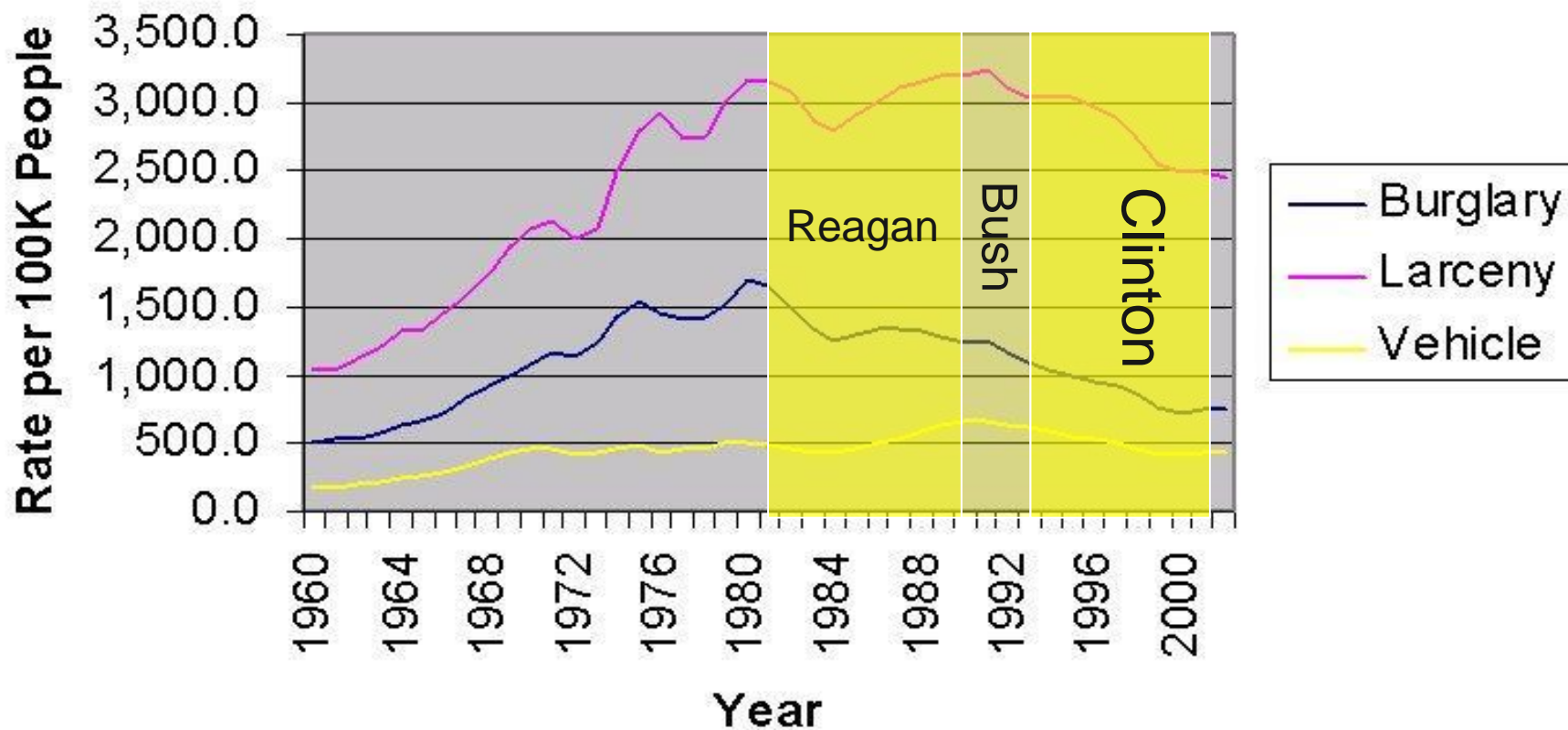
# Australian Domestic Burglary rates



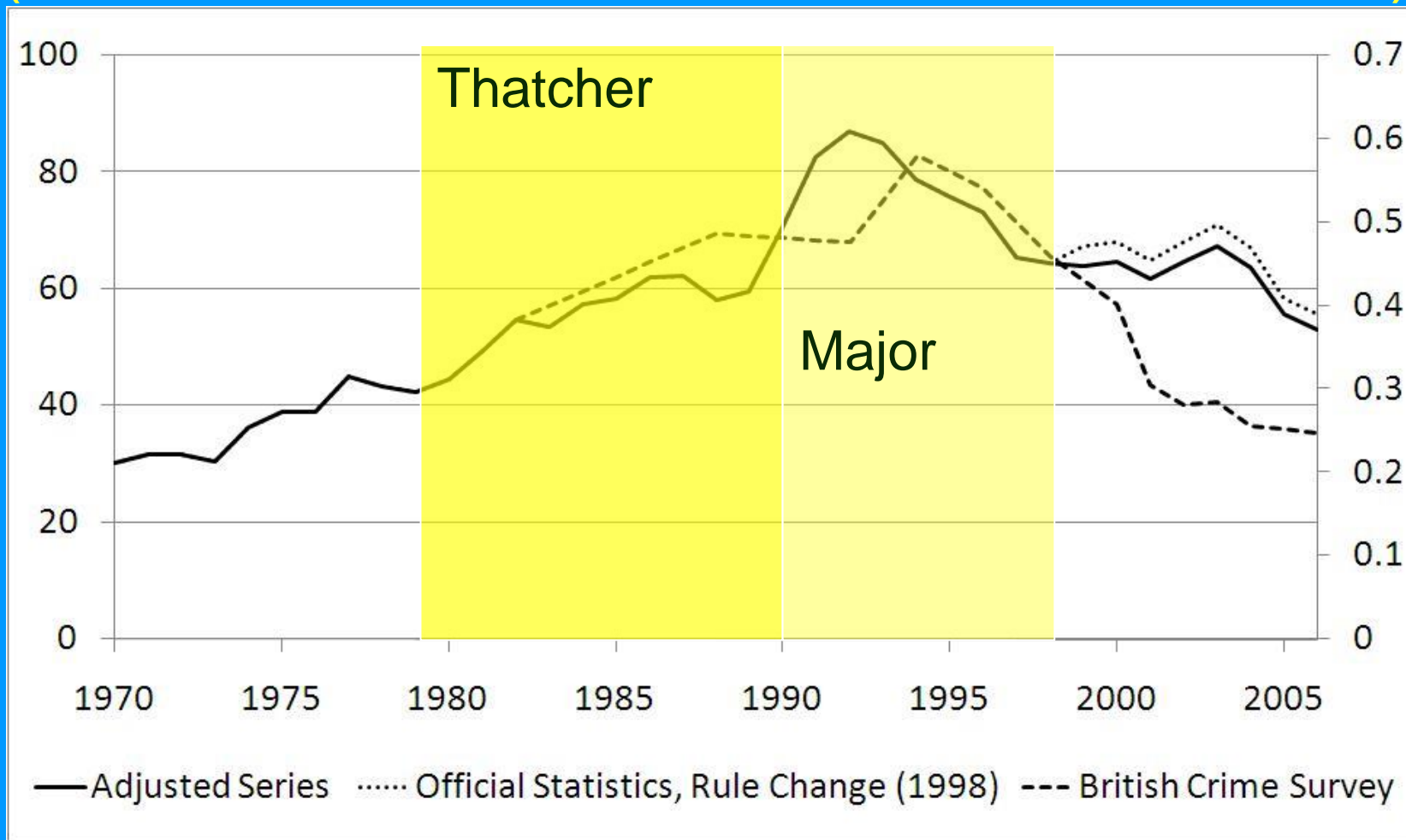


# US crime rates

## Property Crime

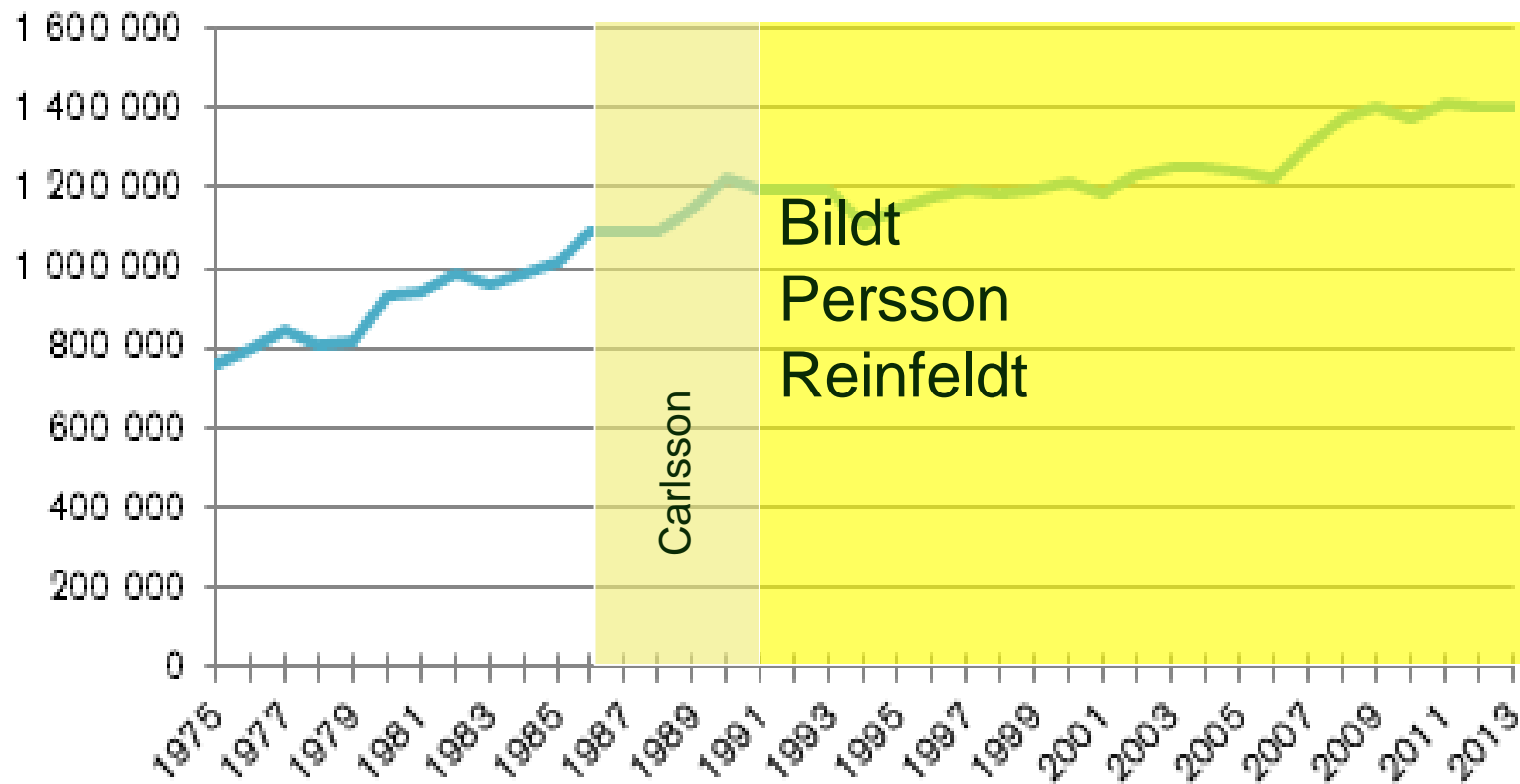


# E&W Property Crime Per Capita (Home Office Recorded Statistics and BCS)





# Swedish crime rates





# Summary

- Crime rising before office (NR was a response to perceptions of rising crime and fear of crime).
- Peaks occurred during NR periods of rule – sometimes several years ‘down the line’ (so lagged processes important).
- Declines in evidence too – due to ‘getting tough’?
- Not simply ‘left’ vs. ‘right’ parties. Many of these governments were ‘left-wing’ (Hawke; Douglas; Carlsson).





# *An Alternative Explanation?*

- No.
- Not all countries experienced New Right political 'reshaping' of social and economic conditions.
- May explain some aspects of rises in some countries (timing, speed of increase, levels of crime).

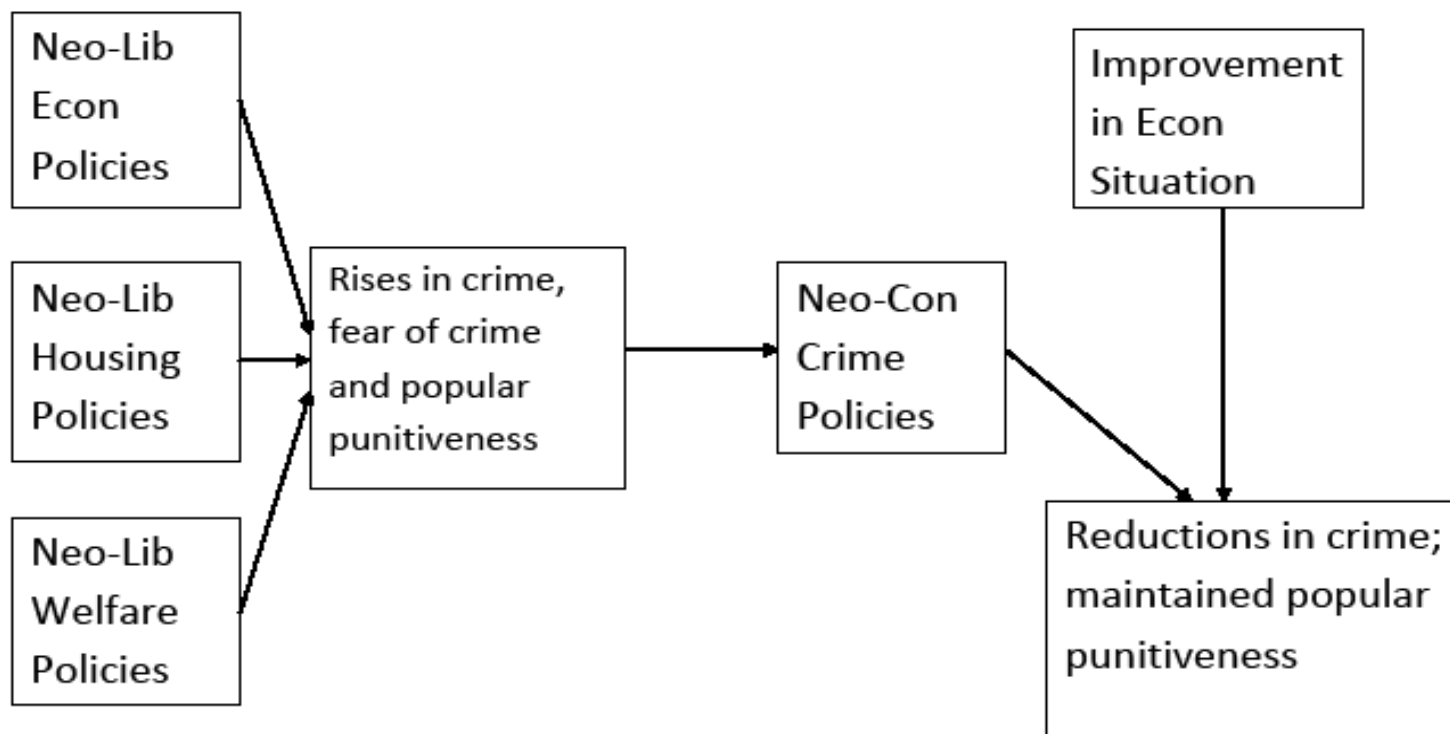


# Will not explain all rises/drops

- Countries have different 'starting points', institutional arrangements and speeds of change. (Much work needed to explore this, of course).
- Constitutional arrangements may limit powers or immediacy of impact on some cases (FPTP; 2<sup>nd</sup> Chambers).
- Nevertheless, crime does not come from nowhere, similarly responses to it are shaped by political discourses.
- New Right ideological has two strands; one liberalising (neo-libs) and one socially conservative (neo-cons). Both played a part in E&W crime trends.



# Politics and Crime Trends





## So ...

- Whilst crime was rising, NR-inspired governments did not do much about it (focusing on the economy). Talk - no action
- As crime rose as a policy concern, so they started to act.
- But those actions (situation crime prevention, increased imprisonment) were coloured by political ideology.
- ... even if SCP does explain decline, we need to explain why SCP was chosen.



# Outline of current work

ESRC grant with Colin Hay, Emily Gray and Will Jennings:

- Analyses of BCS, BSAS, GHS, LFS, BES + national level data. Data sets to be made available autumn 2015.
- Training workshop (Manchester 20<sup>th</sup> May 2015)
- 40min documentary film made (Doc Fest 2015)
- <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/law/research/projects/crimetrajectories>
- Email newsletter (s.farrall@sheffield.ac.uk)
- Twittering: @Thatchers\_legacy



# Further Reading

Farrall, S. and Hay, C. (2010) *Not So Tough on Crime? Why Weren't the Thatcher Governments More Radical In Reforming the Criminal Justice System?* **British Journal of Criminology**, 50(3):550-69.

Farrall, S. and Jennings, W. (2012) *Policy Feedback and the Criminal Justice Agenda: an analysis of the economy, crime rates, politics and public opinion in post-war Britain*, **Contemporary British History**, 26(4):467-488.

Farrall, S. and Jennings, W. (2014) *Thatcherism and Crime: The Beast that Never Roared?*, in Farrall S., and Hay, C. **Thatcher's Legacy: Exploring and Theorising the Long-term Consequences of Thatcherite Social and Economic Policies**, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp 207-233.

Farrall, S. and Hay, C. (2014) *Locating 'Thatcherism' In The 'Here and Now'*, in Farrall S., and Hay, C. **Thatcher's Legacy: Exploring and Theorising the Long-term Consequences of Thatcherite Social and Economic Policies**, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp 315-339.

Farrall, S., Gray, E., Jennings, W. Hay, C. (2014) *Using Ideas Derived from Historical Institutionalism to Illuminate the Long-term Impacts on Crime of 'Thatcherite' Social and Economic Policies: A Working Paper.*

Hay, C. and Farrall, S. (2014) *Interrogating and Conceptualising the Legacy of Thatcherism*, in Farrall S., and Hay, C. **Thatcher's Legacy: Exploring and Theorising the Long-term Consequences of Thatcherite Social and Economic Policies**, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp 3-30.

Hay, C. and Farrall, S. (2011) *Establishing the ontological status of Thatcherism by gauging its 'periodisability': towards a 'cascade theory' of public policy radicalism*, **British Journal of Politics and International Relations**, 13(4): 439-58.

Jennings, W., Farrall, S. and Bevan, S. (2012) *The Economy, Crime and Time: an analysis of recorded property crime in England & Wales 1961-2006*, **International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice**, 40(3):192-210.