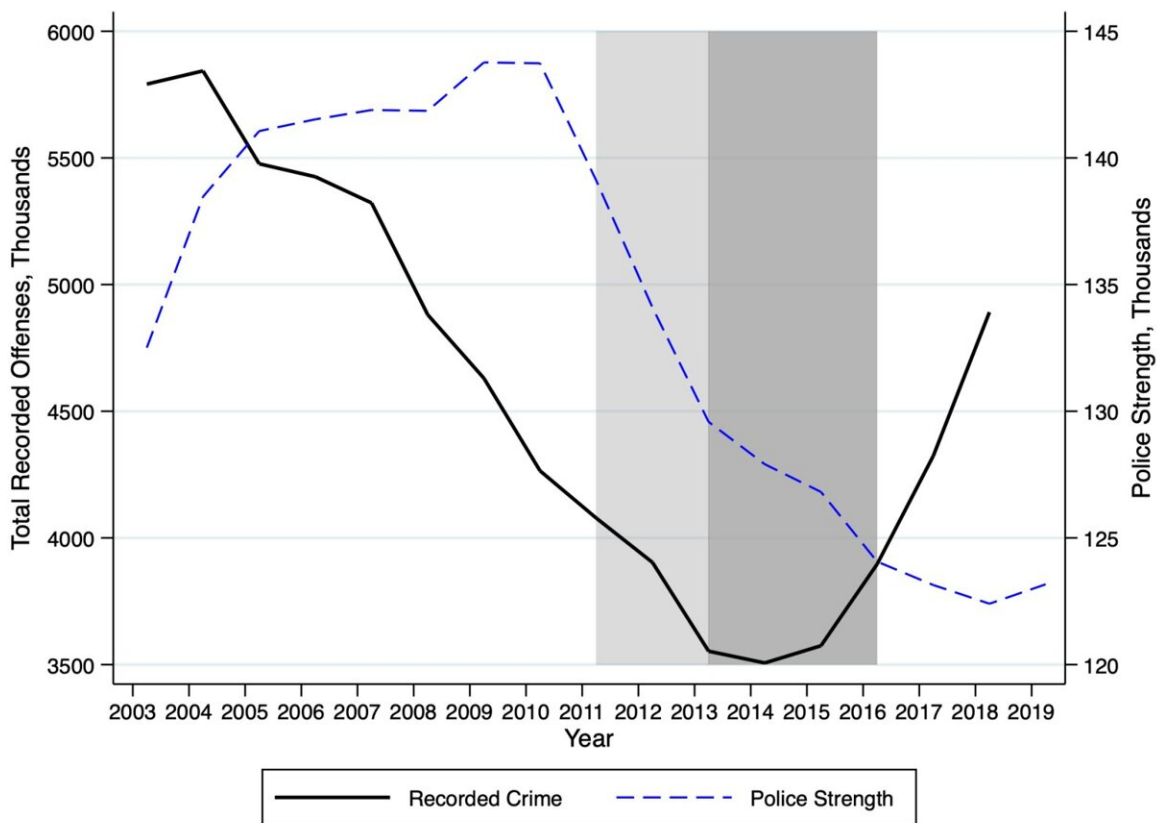


New study finds Austerity 1.0 led to more crime—could we see the same again in Austerity 2.0?

November 22 2022



The Evolution of Crime and Police Strength. Notes: The figure plots full-time equivalent police officer strength and total recorded crime (excluding fraud and computer misuse) for the 43 Police Force Areas in England and Wales as of 31 March of each year. We cut the crime series a year early in order to keep the sample homogeneous—data for Greater Manchester Police (one of the largest police force areas) is not available from 2019 onward due to "the

implementation of a new IT system". The light gray section highlights the pre-period for our analysis sample, the darker gray the post period for our analysis sample. Credit: *Kicking you when you're already down: The multipronged impact of austerity on crime* (2022).

A new study from the University of Southampton has found that Austerity 1.0 led to an increase in crime across urban areas in England and Wales, and an increase in new offenders.

The study, "Kicking You When You're Already Down: The Multipronged Impact of Austerity on Crime," looks at how the first wave of austerity in England and Wales affected crime. The findings come as the Chancellor announced in his Autumn Statement that a fresh round of austerity measures would come into effect in 2024, after the next general election, and include £30 billion planned spending cuts.

The study was authored by Professor Corrado Guilietti (Co-Investigator of ESRC Centre for Population Change and Connecting Generations) and Dr. Brendon McConnell, Lecturer in Economics. It focuses on the impact that austerity-driven welfare cuts had on crime in urban areas in England and Wales during 2011-2015 and documents four distinct aspects of crime that were affected:

- Increase in district-level crime;
- Crime being more concentrated in urban areas;
- Neighborhoods deemed more deprived before austerity experienced the sharpest increase in crime;
- An increase in new offenders.

Dr. Brendon McConnell, said, "Putting these four pieces of evidence together paints a comprehensive picture of the negative consequences of

the first wave of austerity on crime in England and Wales."

The researchers looked at data from several official sources:

- Street-level crime data, collected from police.uk;
- District-level reoffending data from the Ministry of Justice;
- Property-level housing transaction data, from HM Land Registry;
- Additional data on police officer numbers (police force area), as well as local sociodemographics (district level).

Austerity 1.0

In the late 2000s the UK experienced a recession which resulted in the need to make 'fiscal consolidation plans' to reduce the budget deficit. The [coalition government](#) at the time considered raising taxes or cutting [government spending](#), opting for the latter.

These cuts meant substantial reductions in many welfare programs, including Housing Benefits, Disability Living Allowance and Child Benefits, according to previous research.

"What we know is that the areas hit by austerity 1.0 have been affected almost consistently since 2010 and that it never really ended," said Dr. McConnell.

"If austerity 2.0 were to occur, it will create an additional strain on the communities that have lived under the cuts for over a decade now."

Cuts and crime

This study focused on urban areas in England and Wales and found areas hardest hit fell into three broad categories:

- Older, industrial areas of England and Wales;
- Seaside towns;
- London boroughs.

The findings indicate that austerity led to a 3.7% increase in total crime, with an increase in violent crime of 4.8%.

Although areas more vulnerable to the cuts saw an increase in district-level crime, the study found no changes in reoffending, suggesting the increase in crime was being driven by new offenders.

Dr. McConnell said, "The finding that the austerity-induced crime increases are being driven by new offenders points to a further negative consequence of the first wave of austerity."

"Committing a crime for the first time today will likely have future negative consequences—including but not limited to increase exposure to violence, lower legal labor market prospects, and the negative consequences of these on family life."

Dr. McConnell added, "Given that a large body of work in criminology documents the stability of concentration over time and space, the increase we document—a 1.1% rise in concentration—is notable, even though not particularly large."

The study also indicates that welfare cuts led to an increase in crime in poorer areas.

Dr. McConnell said, "The first wave of austerity led to higher crime in districts more exposed to the cuts, and concentrated crime within districts were considerably higher in more deprived neighborhoods."

These neighborhoods, which were identified as deprived prior to the

cuts, experienced the sharpest increase in crime over the first three years of austerity, according to the report.

Dr. McConnell added, "Given that these areas were already suffering from other consequences due to austerity, our results for crime show an additional negative outcome being layered on to areas hardest hit by the welfare cuts."

Previous academic studies have found austerity caused negative changes in other areas, including excess mortality, worse mental health, and increased use of food banks.

"The findings of this work are important for at least two reasons," Dr. McConnell said.

"First, they highlight an additional area of life impacted by large-scale welfare cuts. Any government that takes seriously the idea of evidence-based policy will want to consider these wider consequences when implementing future austerity-related policies."

"Second, we document a net welfare loss from austerity 1.0—the welfare losses we calculate far exceeded the financial savings to the Treasury."

Housing market analysis

The final part of the paper looked at [house prices](#), to measure the total effect of the policy.

The housing market can reflect changes to local characteristics and amenities, such as [crime](#) and other elements that changed due to [austerity](#), and set these into property prices.

Dr. McConnell said, "Using house prices, we document a welfare loss of £92.8billion in the three years following the implementation of the Welfare Reform Act. This is based only on the [urban areas](#) we study, so would be larger for the entire country."

"This loss—borne by local residents—far exceeds the savings made by reducing [welfare](#) generosity, which was estimated to be £43.47billion for the country as a whole."

More information: Report:
www.cpc.ac.uk/docs/WP104_Kicking_you_when_you're_already_down.pdf

Provided by University of Southampton

Citation: New study finds Austerity 1.0 led to more crime—could we see the same again in Austerity 2.0? (2022, November 22) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-11-austerity-crimecould.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
