Explaining Long Term Trends in Violent Crime

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1. Introduction

Since Gurr's seminal article (Gurr 1981; cf. Gurr 1989) the long term development of violent crime or, more specifically, homicide rates in Europe since the early modern age up to the (near) present has been depicted as a "U-shaped curve". Manuel Eisner (2000) has recently extended Gurr's work and provided additional evidence to confirm the overall pattern (see also his paper in this volume). The increase of homicide since, roughly, the 1960s, has been interpreted - by Gurr himself and by others - as one of several deviations around the persistently downward slanting trend, caused by local circumstances and short-lived forces. The task for the theoretician has been defined accordingly: explaining the secular decline of violent crime and short-term departures from it. In the present paper however, I tentatively assume that the upward movement in the second half of the 20th century initiated a long term reversal of the previous trend: higher and presumably still rising levels of violent crime will be with us for quite a while. This implies a redefinition of the explanandum. We have to search for theories that are able to explain both, the secular decline since the 17th century and the (presumably) long-term increase since the 1960s. We cannot content ourselves with a theory that explains the one and not the other. Historians of crime and criminal justice seeking an explanation for the downward trend have, above all, turned to Norbert Elias and his account of the "civilizing process" (Elias 1980).\(^1\) As will be argued in the next section of the present paper, Elias's theory can also help to understand the trend reversal. Additional insights can be gained from another sociological classic, Emile Durkheim, as will be shown in the third section.

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\(^1\) As Johnson & Monkkonen note: "One of the most notable effects of the recent work on the history of crime ... has been to force historians to reassess (or assess for the first time) the work of the sociologist Norbert Elias. Without a doubt, his work has gained the greatest respect of any single theoretician" (1996: 4).
2. The civilizing process and the development of violent crime

When in the mid-1930s Elias wrote his famous dissertation containing an "outline" of a theory of the "civilizing process" he did not intend to explain the long-term development of violent crime. But when his almost forgotten book finally gained world wide recognition in the 1970s, historians of crime and criminal justice became particularly impressed. As Johnson and Monkkonen note: "Elias's significance has come to be recognized in part because his descriptions of the 'civilizing process' match so well what crime historians have been finding" (Johnson & Monkkonen 1996: 4). Elias has been particularly impressive in demonstrating the dynamic interplay of various components of social structure, culture, and personality in the transition from feudal to modern societies in Europe. According to Elias, the major pacifying forces that have been unfolding in the long extended civilizing process (or processes) are the following:

(1) The creation of the state monopoly of violence and its subsequent legitimation in the processes of democratization. (The second stage has often been neglected, and we even have to add a third stage, as I will argue later.)

(2) The extension of the market economy implying the elongation of action chains and increasing functional interdependencies between individual and collective actors.

(3) The promulgation of a culture of non-violence, increasing condemnation of and even revulsion to the infliction of serious bodily harm including corporal punishment

(4) The transformation of personality structures in the direction of increased self-control.

All of these processes Elias has shown to be closely interrelated in a way that cannot be delineated in this paper. They are more or less cumulative and sufficiently continuous as to fit into a trend pattern

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2 The state's monopoly of violence, of course, does not rule out the possibility that the "state" wages war against other states or against parts of its own populace. Criminal actions by the state (an important subject in itself) are not considered in this paper

3 This statement about the cumulative unfolding of a pattern is meant to be descriptive, I do not wish to subscribe to the evolutionary logic adopted by Elias. Although certain configurations may display the potential of systemic unfolding, the unfolding not only is unlikely to proceed in a linear way. At its beginning, it is also unclear whether or not it leads to a state of equilibrium, dissolution, smooth transformation or violent transition to yet another configuration.
that can be imagined to be inversely related to the secular decline of homicide rates. If used as an explanatory account for violent crime, the weakest element in this scheme, it seems to me, is the notion of affect control. Even if one assumes that the capacity of individual persons to control their aggressive impulses has increased and trickled down, so to speak, from higher to lower social strata (an assumption not shared by a number of cultural historians), this does not necessarily imply less killings. As Peter Spierenburg has pointed out: "If increasing affect control, the taming of spontaneous drives and impulses, is indeed the dominant sociopsychological trend over the last seven centuries or so of European history, a high incidence of deliberate killings today would not be incompatible with is... (T)he proportion of 'killings in affect',..., may have declined, while that of carefully premeditated murders may have remained stable or even risen" (1996: 69). There is also a severe conceptual problem involved in Elias's notion of affect control. When he explains why the disciplinary forces located in the developing state authorities and market institutions should have stimulated the formation or strengthening of internalized control patterns, Elias, at least in his original study, points to force ("Zwang") and fear ("Angst") as the prime mediators. So, he expressly claims that the adolescent youth will never advance to a sufficient regulation of his behavior without experiencing "fear, arising from other human beings" (Elias 1980, Vol. I, p. 447). - Now, force and fear may produce strong super-egos, but weak egos; they promote rigidly controlled behavior, but may also become the seedbed of suppressed neurotic energies waiting for an occasion to explode; they are likely to create authoritarian characters that may refrain from individual acts of crime but quickly unleash their suppressed emotions and turn to violence, if the state or another figure of authority legitimates or demands such action. The rise of totalitarian regimes in the 20th century, particularly Nazism in Germany, and, on a different scale, the destructive consequences of sexual repression point to the limits of an internalized control pattern that has been implanted by force and fear. Elias's theory of affect control

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4 For a concise critique of this conception see Honneth and Joas (1980, pp. 115-123).

5 Spierenburg refers to a rising or continuously high level of homicides within the biological family. He then offers the following interpretation: "If family homicide maintains a relatively stable level even today, this would be compatible with the theory of an increase in affect regulation. As affects and emotions were the subject of increasing constraints in the wider society, the nuclear family came to serve as an island where emotions were cultivated" (1996: 71 f.) Pushed to a logical end the argument may read: The family had to pay the psychological costs of the suppression of emotions outside its bounds. - Later in his work Elias' has introduced the concept of "deformalization" intended to better
therefore needs to be contrasted with another model of acquiring "moral competence" and flexible behavioral control, a model originating in the works of Piaget\(^6\) and G. H. Mead: The learning of moral standards and the creation of a reflective self through participation in cooperative transactions between "equals"; the internalization of the control pattern of "dialogue" which is supported, in the political sphere, by public discourse and democratic institutions.

Despite of these shortcomings, the first three of Elias's generalizations mentioned above, may still be seen as foundational to any attempt to explain the long downward trend in homicide committals since the 17th century. But what about the manifold digressions from this trend, in particular the fairly steady increase in violent crime in the second half of the 20th century? There is a strong evolutionary component in Elias's theory, but he has always allowed for perturbances, temporary stops or turns, even phases of decivilization. There are problems of logical coherence involved in that, and there is a strong temptation to settle down with flimsy \textit{ad hoc} explanations. One path that one might follow, is traced out in Elias's reflections upon the shifting balance between the "I" and the "We", the weight and significance accorded, respectively, to the "individual" and the "collective" components that are to be integrated within personal identities, a task on which one might succeed or fail - more or less (Elias 1991: 209-315). Underlying these considerations is the idea that various components of civilizing processes might move at different speeds, one running ahead of the other that might catch up later (or, perhaps, not at all). For the more recent period, Elias has pointed to the changing role of the nation-state who has been loosing its position as the highest-ranking "survival unit" while personal identities are still attached to it. This incurs strain and stress experiences which might easily be related to the concept of "anomie" as introduced by Durkheim. Elias seems to assume that reintegration on a supra-national, possibly world wide, basis would eventually be achieved. If we accept this evolutionary perspective, we are led to assume the recent increase of violent crime to be a temporary occurrence. At present, however, I do not see any strong indicators that would support the hypothesis that a world monopoly account for the growing need of having more flexible structures of self-control. This new analytical element, however, has simply been added to rather than integrated with the old concept, and it is unclear how flexibility can be obtained by someone who has internalized rules by force and fear.

\(^6\) Piaget's critique (published in 1932) of Durkheim's ideas on moral education (stressing the role of hierarchy and disciplin) would be even more pertinent to Elias's conception.
of power might be achieved in the foreseeable future. But if we discard the evolutionary component in Elias's theory, we may still use the more specific hypotheses to explain the presumed trend reversal. If, for example, the development of the state's monopoly of violence and its subsequent "domestication" within liberal democratic systems is chiefly responsible for decreasing interpersonal violence, one should expect an increase of such violence, if the legitimate monopoly of violence is weakened or crumbling without being supplanted by functionally equivalent forces. Several researchers have developed strong arguments and presented a number of indicators that lend credence to the hypothesis that the institutional nexus in which the legitimacy and the effectiveness of the state monopoly of violence were closely intertwined with each other has started to erode and will continue to do so. The German sociologist Klaus von Trotha, e. g., speaks of a "oligarchic-preventive order of security" (OPOS) which has been emerging in Western democracies during the last decades (v. Trotha 1995). It is characterized by, among others things, the remarkable growth of private security industries and services; moves towards privatization of prisons; the promulgation of communitarian control-orders; the 'mechanization' of policing. He notes that the newly emerging OPOS is without a "center", that the responsibility of the political and administrative agencies have been replaced by the purchasing power of clients in security markets which transform the structures of economic inequality into the social inequality of differentially available security. This "commodification of security" normalizes the use of violence which progressively penetrates into the web of social relationships (von Trotha 1995: 157-159). The validity of v. Trothas's analysis cannot be discussed in this paper, but note that the thesis about a general "legitimation crisis" (Habermas 1973) and the dissolution of the functional prerogatives of the state (Luhmann 1981) have been with us for quite a while. In a recent book, Gary LaFree (1998) has linked the rising crime rates in the United States since the 1960s to a wide variety of indicators of diminished legitimacy of social, political, and economic institutions. The protest movements that called into question the legitimacy of "the system" in the 1960s were primarily politically and morally motivated (e. g., civil rights issues and the war in Vietnam in the U.S.A, the insistence of the young generation to discuss responsibilities for the nazi-terror in Germany). A second, more powerful and still unfolding wave of delegitimation and diminishing state power has been set in motion by various technological innovations and economic developments now summarized under the heading of "globalization". In these processes a positive feedback system seems to have established itself in which diminishing control capacities of the nation-state undermine his legitimacy and subsequently further diminish his
regulatory powers (cf. Castells 1996). In particular, globalizing free market economies have under-
mined the state's monopoly of taxation, upon which - to remember Elias - the monopoly of violence 
had been founded. On a more concrete level of analysis, one would have to talk about the internaliza-
tion of organized crime, and about technological developments in weaponry and worldwide electronic 
communication that have put certain types of criminals into a rather advantageous position over against 
the state. As a consequence, the state increasingly finds himself in a dilemmatic situation where it either 
has to let go or apply "big brother" strategies outside the legitimation boundaries.

A second line of reasoning may elaborate upon Elias's somewhat deficient conception of affect control 
and refine it into a multi-dimensional concept of self-control, as suggested, e. g., by Gottfredson & 
Hirschi (1990). Eisner (1995, 1997) drawing on this improved concept has advanced the hypothesis 
that in (post-)modern societies there is opening up a growing gap between the increasing demand for 
self control\(^7\) and the diminishing ability of the individual person to acquire and supply self control. This 
hypothesis is compatible with Elias's theory and may even draw on it. Elias, to remember, had linked 
the strengthening of self-control to the preponderance of long action chains rewarding those people 
that were able to delay satisfaction and plan their actions far ahead. This "long view" has become less 
functional in postmodern "risk" societies (Beck), where future outcomes of personal investments have 
become rather unpredictable. Also, the protection of the "private sphere", a structural pre-requisite for 
developing strong self-control, seems to be crumbling, not by the intrusion of the state, perhaps, but 
rather by the transgressions of the mass media and business communications.

These hypotheses would need more elaboration, of course, but at this point they are only intended to 
indicate how Elias's theoretical framework might be used to account not merely for the long downward 
trend in homicide but also to generate hypotheses aimed at explaining the presumed trend reversal.

\(^7\) Maybe this demand for self-control is not so much growing but becoming increasingly 
contradictory asking for highly self-disciplined behavior in the sphere of "production" and unfettered 
indulgence in the sphere of "consumption" (cf. Bell's thesis on the "cultural contradictions of capitalism"; 
Bell 1976).
3. Durkheimian Perspectives

Additional insights are provided by another sociological classic, Emile Durkheim, who has been largely neglected or oddly misinterpreted by historians of crime. He has been branded as a conservative thinker sticking to collectivist ideology. The opposite is true. Some 40 years before Elias wrote his dissertation, Durkheim suggested "that with the progress of civilization homicide decreases" (Durkheim 1992: 113). The reason for this, he saw in the de-mystification of the collectivity and its devaluation relative to the "worshiping" of the individual. "Collectivism" he construed as a cultural pattern in which the group - the family, the clan, the caste, a religious community, the state - was valued more, much more, than the individual and his well-being. This pattern had to break down in the course of increased social differentiation. In collectivist societies the individual is enmeshed in a tightly woven web of symbolic references and intimations that easily arise passions directed against those who fail to pay due respect to the norms and the honor of the group on which the honor of the individual member is dependent. He himself and his life count little. The collectivity takes on the quality of a sacred being demanding harsh reactions against those who step out of line, thereby creating a culture of violence. High levels of passion and low respect for the individual person (combined with a generally low level of state control in every day affairs) increase the propensity to use violence against another person. Although Durkheim notes in a very general way that "passion leads to violence (ibid., p. 117), he does not construe the problem in terms of inner-psychic control mechanisms. Rather, the passions are viewed as being directly regulated or molded by culture. The reason why passions are lower or more constrained in individualist cultures (though the collectivist sentiment may value the individual just as intensely as the group was valued before) seems to be that the person who violates the norms (and is to be punished for that) is, so to speak, an incarnation of the very object which is now being worshiped, i.e., the individual in general (cf. Durkheim 1978).

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8 Charles Tilly's verdict about the "Useless Durkheim" (Tilly 1981) is utterly mistaken.

9 (T)hose causes put together which, by increasing diversities of the members of all societies, have left them with no essential characteristics in common except those they get from their intrinsic quality of human nature. It is this quality that quite naturally becomes the supreme object of collective sensibility" (Durkheim 1912: 112). So, individualism is intrinsically related to universalism.
Durkheim believes that it is not so much the rise of individualism that directly causes the reduction of homicide committals but rather the erosion of collectivism (Durkheim 1999: 163). Durkheim's hypothesis about the relationship between collectivism/individualism and murder has been confirmed by several cross-national studies using individual level data (see Karstedt 2000) or aggregated data (see, e.g., Messner 1982). I can now present additional evidence based on German data available for some 1000 districts (Land- and Stadtkreise) of the German Reich. Conviction rates for assault and battery (serious bodily harm) have been calculated per 100,000 legally liable persons more than 17 years old and averaged over five years from 1898 to 1902. For most of these districts the birth rates (number of births per 1000 inhabitants) are also available and have been averaged over the years 1899 to 1901. I propose to interpret the birthrate as a correlational (not an analytical) indicator of the relative degree of collectivist versus individualist orientation in a given district. The higher the birth-rate, the stronger the collectivist and the weaker the individualist orientation should be. Figure 1 presents the scatterplot and the regression line relating assault and battery ($AB$) to the birthrates of more than 800 German districts.

![Figure 1 here](image)

The scatterplot demonstrates that 37 percent of the variation in $AB$ can be explained by birthrate. If we perform the same regression analysis for the somewhat less heterogenous Prussian districts (some 500 cases), the percentage of explained variance increases to 50 percent. For the Prussian districts

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10 He has been lead to this conclusion mainly by empirical observations. He notes (from the data that were available to him) that while the homicide rate had been decreasing, assault and theft (that also count as offenses against the individual person) had been rising at the same time. I think that we can dismiss this argument on methodological grounds: (1) As Gurr (1989) has pointed out, in the 19th century the increase in assault rates may be due to a growing sensitization towards even minor forms of inflicting bodily harm, which in turn stimulated reporting and prosecution. (2) If the upward trend would nonetheless be real, this still does not disprove that individualist orientations contribute to lowering any forms of violent behavior. It could just be that, temporarily, other forces and motives conducive to violence had become stronger (like economic hardship, political conflict, or a rapid acceleration of social change).

11 I would not interpret the birthrates of contemporary societies in such a way.
we can add a number of structural variables in order to construct a simple path model with birthrate as
the intervening variable. The regression results are presented in Figure 2.

The structural variables are: the proportion of people who had enough income or other fortunes to pay
a certain tax, *Ergänzungsabgabe* (*TAX*); the proportion of the labor force employed in industry
(*INDUSTRY*); the proportion of the labor force working in public services or as professionals
(*PROFSERV*); the proportion of Catholics (*CATHOLICS*); a dummy-variable that differentiates
between urban and rural districts (*URBDUM*); and a dummy-variable to identify those districts which
inhabited a high proportion of people from Poland or the Baltic countries (*FOREIGN*). All these
variables add only 4% to the amount of variance explained by birth control alone. If, on the other
hand, we control for all these structural properties, the birthrate remains the most effective predictor
with a standardized regression coefficient of $\hat{a} = 0.54$. The only variables that remain statistically
"significant", if we control for birthrate, are the indicator for relative economic prosperity ($\hat{a} = -0.13$)
and the indicator for ethnic conflict ($\hat{a} = 0.21$). But they explain assault and battery to a much lesser
extent than the birthrate. This result was not anticipated, I must admit. Thus, I can only offer a *post
festum* explanation, and I can only offer it in terms of Durkheimian theory: The result makes sense if
we accept the birthrate as a cultural indicator for the relative weight of collectivist versus individualist
orientation present in a given district. The higher the birthrate, i.e., the stronger the collectivist thinking,
the higher the rate of violent crime.

One might suspect that the birthrate confounds cultural patterns with demographic and other social
characteristics like age and the sex-ratio. For some 35 large cities we can control for the sex-ratio
given in the cohort of 25 to 34 year olds. The correlation between birthrate and crime rate is hardly
affected, Pearson's *r* only drops from 0.69 to 0.61. I have run some additional analyses with other
controls, but the basic result has always been maintained.\(^{12}\)

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\(^{12}\) A fuller report is given in Thome (1999). The project was supported by a grant (TH 260/3-1)
from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.
The erosion of collectivism, according to Durkheim, has paved the road towards a culture of non-violence. But individualism is not a unitary, homogenous social type. It may degenerate into forms that are conducive to violence, albeit on a lower level. The "healthy" or "normal" type of individualism he calls moral individualism. "Pathological" individualism is broken down into two subtypes referred to as anomic and egoistic individualism. For the latter type he also uses the term "excessive" individualism, which implies that there is a quantitative dimension involved here. Moral individualism, however, cannot simply be placed half-way between collectivism and excessive individualism, because all types of individualism differ from collectivism by valuing the individual more than the group. As a theoretical perspective, moral individualism realizes that "individualism itself is a social product, like all moralities and all religions. The individual receives from society even the moral beliefs which deify him", it is "that which the Declaration of the Rights of Man sought, more or less successfully, to give a formula to" (quoted from Marske 1987: 11), it is the collective sentiment presupposed in organic solidarity (Giddens 1971: 480). As a social practice, moral individualism is founded on sentiments of sympathy and respect for others. Egoistic individualism finds its theoretical expression in utilitarian philosophy as represented in Spencer's work. As a social practice it is the rigorous pursuit of self-interest where (in the ideal-typical case) the individual uses other individuals as mere means to his own ends, a strategy which may incur high emotional costs as Durkheim makes clear in his discussion of egoistic suicide. Just like collectivism, egoistic individualism is particularistic rather than universalistic. It is the illusionary denial of the sociability of man; it does not indicate a lack of regulation or orientation; rather, it is a delusion. Using Habermas's terminology (Habermas 1981) one may put it this way: If egoistic individualism prevails over moral individualism strategic action dominates over communicative action. Finally, anomie is defined by a lack of moral regulation and orientation which makes the individual fall prey to his unbridled needs and desires, not knowing his proper place in society, and, as one might put it today: not finding a clearly delimited personal identity. On a more socio-structural level, "anomie" was construed by Durkheim as the "forced division of labor" which prevents the

\[^{13}\text{Durkheim, too, speaks of societies as being more or less civilized.}\]

\[^{14}\text{The modern version of "moral individualism" that comes closest to Durkheim's is the social philosophy of "communitarianism" as proposed by Bellah, Etzioni and others in the USA - with important differences regarding the conception of the state.}\]
individual from fully developing his capabilities and from working according to his faculties. Durkheim was wavering between the idea that pathological levels of anomie would be reached only in times of rapid social change ("acute" anomie), and the fear that the dynamics of an increasingly unregulated economy and the ensuing "moral anarchy" would render anomie chronic. Before looking at socio-structural arrangements that may promote anomie and excessive individualism, I will briefly consider the relationship between Durkheim's types of individualism and homicide.

Durkheim has explained at some length (cf. Durkheim 1992, chp. 10) why the decline of collectivism should decrease homicide. He has also carefully spelled out why anomic and egoistic individualism should be conducive to suicide. It is much less clear from his writings why pathological individualism should stimulate criminal activities including interpersonal violence. He explicitly states that those socio-structural conditions which stimulate anomic suicide are also conducive to homicide (Durkheim 1990: 422-423). Egoistic individualism, instead, he assumes to be a stimulant only to suicide, not to murder (ibid., p. 422). But Durkheim's argumentation appears to be inconsistent on this point. If the egoist treats his fellow human beings primarily as a means to achieving personal ends, why should he not be motivated to kill him if he stands in his way (as practiced by professional killers viz. those persons that have hired them)? Gary LaFree (referring to work done by Steffensmeier) notes that in the United States "the rate of instrumental, felony-related killings (e.g., contract murders) increases substantially during the postwar period (from about 7 percent of all murders in 1960 to about 20 percent in 1990)" (LaFree 1998: 40-41). 16 Durkheim (at least in his suicide book) seems to overlook the possibility that murder, though it might be committed out of passion, could also be done cold-bloodedly or even out of boredom as well. Furthermore, anomic as well as egoistic individualism may stimulate forms of a defensive, reactionary collectivism as exemplified in the activities of neo-Nazi groups in Germany or the revival of religious fundamentalism in the USA (using, e.g., violence against medical doctors who support abortion). I would even surmise, that the practice of capital punishment, the increasing number

15 For a particularly useful study of Durkheim's conception of anomie see Besnard (1993).

16 The promulgation of "instrumentalism" as the seedbed of barbarism within modern societies is a theme, of course, that has been prominent within various traditions of sociological and philosophical thinking (most noticeably, perhaps, within the Frankfurt School of social philosophy: Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Fromm).
of executions in the U.S.A. since the 1980s also point to this "elective affinity" between excessive individualism and reactionary (regressive) collectivism. There is no time for me to pursue this issue any further here. I would rather like to take at brief look at the other side of the functional relationship Durkheim was concerned with: What are the societal structures that foster moral individualism on the one hand or pathological forms of individualism (and defensive collectivism) on the other hand? And do we have reason to assume that anomic and excessive individualism are rising?

As for Durkheim, the most decisive role is played by the state in its relation to the economy. The state is "the organ of moral discipline" (Durkheim 1992: pp. 72, 69), but it is also the champion of individualism. Without the state, the individual could not have been set free from his primordial bondages, without the state there would be no power to protect the individual against the "tyrannic" claims of his group. Durkheim, by a review of history, is lead to the conclusion that "except for the abnormal cases ..., the stronger the State, the more the individual is respected" (ibid., p. 57). Durkheim expressly rejects the Hegelian, the socialist and the utilitarian (liberal) conception of the state. What he had in mind was a democratic state whose power had to be limited by strong secondary groups, free social associations, that would mediate between the individual and the state. The state, however, should be strong enough to protect moral individualism from the onslaught of moral anarchy that was looming in the economic sphere threatening to intrude into other spheres of social life. The state should have adequate regulatory power to secure sufficient measures of justice, equity and equality considered to be structural pre-conditions without which moral individualism could not be maintained. 17

So, looking back at Elias's theory, we have to add a third stage in the pacifying process of state formation: The monopoly of violence and political democratization (the rule of law and the generalized

17 Though Durkheim believed that anomie was not inherent in the advanced division of labor he was deeply concerned about the 'crisis of his time'. He envisioned a situation in which anomie had become chronic and where government instead of regulating economic life would become its tool and servant (cf. Marske 1987: 9). Durkheim certainly overstated his case by assuming that there was no social fact without a moral fact, that each aspect of social structure was infused with moral meaning (cf. Fenton 1984). But his insights into the functions the state must perform in order to maintain moral individualism and organic solidarity remain suggestive.

The problem of anomie could be re-phrased in terms of Habermas's ideas on the "systems of purposive action" encroaching upon ("colonizing") the "life-world" of human beings, i. e., the social arena in which individuals engage in communicative action to built up and preserve personal and collective identities (Habermas 1981).
right to vote) had to be supplemented by social democratization, that is, by installing some form of the welfare state. In the European nations this development progressed into the 20th century and reached its climax in the late 60's, early 70's and has come under increasing attack since then, for ideological, political and economic reasons.\(^{18}\) This does not seem to fit neatly into the trend of homicide rates that started their upsurge earlier in the sixties. From a methodological point of view, however, one has to consider the possibility that long term processes (like the restructuring of the relationship between the nation-state and the economy, the erosion of the legitimacy and effectiveness of the monopoly of violence, increasing deficits in self-control) may have taken up where short-term processes stopped. With respect to short-term forces, Gurr (1989), e. g., has suggested that the first wave of increased interpersonal violence in the sixties was partly the result of a post-war baby boom which increased significantly the proportion of crime-prone young men. On the other hand, the large-scale societal transformations that might undermine "organic solidarity" and "moral individualism" have been on the move for quite a while before "Thatcherism" and "Reagonomics" came in, and the advances in electronic communication and economic globalization accelerated. The students' rebellion in the mid-sixties indicated a serious generational and political legitimation crises;\(^{19}\) "post-industrialism" lead to changes not only in occupational structures, but also in life-style, gender relations and family structures; finally, the abandonment of the Bretton Woods agreement in 1971 (i. e., the abolition of the system of fixed exchange rates) already signaled the growing power of unaccountable and amorphous international financial forces (I. Taylor 1997: 286).

4. Conclusion

The postwar baby-boom, the acute political legitimation crisis (as indicated by various protest movements starting in the early 1960s), a slackening economy (with rising inflation and unemployment since the early 1970s) - all these (and some other short-term) forces have cumulatively contributed to starting the upward trend in violent crime since the 1960s. But as such, they could not have effectuated

\(^{18}\) The role of the welfare state in holding down violent crime (or limiting its increase) has been documented by several cross-national studies, among them Gartner (1990), Messner & Rosenfeld (1997); Tham (1998).

\(^{19}\) Gary LaFree (1998) has made the loss of legitimacy of political and social institutions the key concept in has explanation of rising crime rates in the United States since the 1960s.
a lasting reversal of the long-term trend that had gone downward for centuries. In order to predict or account for a lasting reversal of the trend, one has to look at more fundamental processes of social change, processes that have been summarized by various authors under such labels as "post-industrialism" (Bell), "high-modernity" (Giddens), "post-modernity" (Baumann), "risk society" (Beck), "information age" (Castells) and, in recent years most often, as "globalization processes".

Elias and Durkheim, both of them, offer clearly focused analytical frameworks that (despite of some conceptual shortcomings and outdated premises\(^{20}\)) help to identify among the complexly intertwined processes of social change (and the welter of social theories that seek to describe and explain them) those elements and components that might be most relevant for understanding long-term trends in violent crime. Both point to the crucial role of the state, Elias emphasizing its control over the means of violence, Durkheim its general regulatory capacity, in particular over against the economy. Both portray the (democratic) state as being instrumental in the progressive development of a culture of non-violence which, as Durkheim points out, decisively rests upon the state's capacity to insure a sufficient degree of justice and equality. Only the state has the capacity to balance personal freedom and equality. Elias and Durkheim characterize "modernization" as an ongoing process of "individualization" which both interpret as normatively desirable. Both of them point to discontinuities and imbalances inherent to these processes, and Durkheim envisions the possibility that moral anarchy and the powerful dynamics of the economy may eventually undermine the regulatory capacity of the state and the cooperative forms of "moral" individualism, thereby giving way to crime conducive forms of "egoistic" individualism and "anomie".

Most economists and social scientists seem to agree upon the observation that inequality and social marginalization have generally been rising since the 1970s and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. At the same time, the state's monopoly of violence and of taxation has been eroding, and its general capacity to regulate economic and social affairs in such a way as to maintain moral individualism seems to be dwindling. On a very general and abstract level of thinking, one might particularly note

\(^{20}\) Obviously, Elias's and Durkheim's theories could easily be amended by insights from other sociological classics like Max Weber and Georg Simmel; and some of the shortcomings and flawed premises could readily be corrected by contemporary research and theorizing within various fields, including psychology and history.
the following long-term processes as containing the potential for chronic forms of anomie:

1. The increasing pace of technological innovations and shortened production cycles, coupled with organizational reforms and personnel-turnover, lead to changes in our material and symbolic environment that develop faster than our capacity to make sense of them and to construe secure normative orientations towards them. The number of options from which we have to choose increases, whereas the criteria on which to base our choices become uncertain. And once we have managed to separate the desirable from the desired, we discover that the number of desirable options is much larger than the time and material resources needed to realize them. The sense of "contingency" is thus promulgating and intensifying, fostering instrumentalist orientations and making it less likely to built up value commitments that convey a firm sense of identity, orientation, and responsibility.

2. Mankind is not only perfecting the means to manipulate (and put in danger) the natural environment, but also the internal nature of the human species. Technologies are becoming available that allow for the manipulation of our own body: to reshape it, to interfere with the chemistry of our brains, the reproduction of our cells, the genetic outfit that we convey to our children, and (perhaps) we will eventually be able to copy our own bodies and treat them as commodities. This will drastically change the conception of ourselves and of human dignity in general. Can we still "worship" (Durkheim) the individual whose feelings and sensations can be manipulated by technical means, and whose body can be repaired in almost all its parts? If it were the case that a large majority of all the people in the world would opt for not going any further on this road, the systemic logic of a globalized free market economy would still push forward in that direction. This might be a self-fulfilling prophecy, but it would still be anomie worse than ever.
Figure 1

Assault and Battery (per 100,000 legally liable persons)
depending upon birthrate (per 1000 inhabitants)

Birthrate 1889-1901
Figure 2
Pathmodel relating exogenous variables and birthrate to assault and battery (Prussian districts)

\[ R^2 = 0.54 \]