

Broken Windows

Sociology

The disorder hypothesis, and evidence much weaker than its influence.

The claim

- Visible disorder signals no one is watching
- Signal invites more serious offending
- Fixing small things prevents large ones
- Wilson and Kelling, 1982, in an essay
- Adopted widely by police forces

The evidence

- Crime fell in cities that never adopted it
- Disorder and crime may share a common cause
- Sampson and Raudenbush found weak links
- Order-maintenance policing fell unequally
- Some place-based trials show modest effects

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

Contested. Cleaning and repair show more consistent results than aggressive order-maintenance policing does.

Educational reference, not policy advice. The 1990s crime decline has many competing explanations and no settled account.