

The Broken Windows Debate

Criminal Justice

The disorder thesis, the enforcement strategy built on it, and the critique.

The thesis

- Visible disorder signals that no one is watching
- That signal invites more disorder and crime
- Fixing small problems prevents larger ones
- Order maintenance counts as prevention

The critique

- Disorder and crime share common causes
- Sampson and Raudenbush: link largely spurious
- The enforcement version raised arrest volume
- Costs to legitimacy in targeted communities
- Experiments on disorder cues give mixed results

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

Repairing disorder can be justified in its own right; the causal claim about serious crime is weakly supported.

Educational reference. The disorder thesis and zero-tolerance enforcement are separate claims and are argued separately.