

Sociology Shortcuts

D2. Administrative Criminology

In the late 1960's / early 1970's there was a general political perception in Britain and America that the "fight against crime" was not only being lost, but that attempts to explain and solve offending behaviours were ineffective.

The best we can do is develop ways to **limit** the impact of crime and this led to what's been termed an **administrative approach** to crime prevention - one that's come to be intimately associated with **New Right** (conservative) political approaches over the past 50 years..

Clarke (1980), for example, argues that rather than search for "causes of crime", sociologists should focus on two ideas designed to limit the *impact* of crime:

1. **Crime prevention** involves developing policies to discourage criminal activity, such as making crime more-risky through the use of CCTV.
2. **Crime management** involves the various ways *policing resources* are employed. This involves things like examining **patterns of crime**, creating **crime maps**, allocating resources to "crime hotspots" and the like.

Two central tenets of a New Right administrative criminology are claims - supported by a range of **empirical evidence** - that the *majority* of crimes have two characteristics that made them amenable to **prevention**:

1. **Opportunism**: **Clarke** argues most crime is unplanned and carried out "on the spur of the moment"; if an opportunity occurs (a purse left unattended, for example) an offender may be tempted if the chances of being detected are less than the likely benefits (a **cost / benefit analysis** of crime central to a subset of New Right approaches called **Right Realism**).

2. **Territorialism**: Most crime, **Wiles and Costello** (2000) argue, is *local* to the offender. The "average distance travelled to commit domestic burglary", for example, was around 2 miles. The emphasis on territory is significant for New Right administrative approaches on two levels:

1. It draws on **ecological** theories about people's relationship to their environment, in terms of how physical and social environments encourage or discourage deviance.
2. More-specifically territorialism is important for crime control because crimes committed *outside* the offender's local area are mainly related, **Wiles and Costello** argue, to **Routine Activity Theory (RAT)**: the idea most criminal opportunities present themselves "during an individual's normal routine", rather than being planned. Violent crimes, for example, are more-likely to occur in situations - such as pubs and clubs - where young men congregate and drink large amounts of alcohol over a short period.

If measures are taken to **reduce opportunities** for crime in an area, such as **hotspot policing** and **CCTV**, crime rates fall: the **denial of opportunity**, allied to **territoriality**, means the majority of crimes will *not* be **displaced** to other areas (although there are exceptions: drug smuggling and prostitution, for example, are sensitive to displacement).



New Right administrative approaches argue that, since **crime is endemic**, we can only limit its impact through **prevention strategies** that make crime:

- more difficult
- less attractive
- more costly.

This is done by changing two environments:

1. **Cultural environments**: Strategies here focus on **denying opportunities** to potential offenders through more effective **territorial controls**.

Advertising campaigns can be used to make people more aware of criminal opportunities and how to deny opportunities by protecting their property.



Strategies designed to increase community-based **surveillance** included promoting:

- 'informal-policing' (such as Neighbourhood Watch),
- **information gathering** (Crimestoppers provides rewards for informing on offenders).
- **closer police-community relations**. The introduction of **community support officers** in the 1990's was designed to help develop these links - although **Gilling** (1999) has questioned their effectiveness in this role.

2. **Physical environments**: Controlling crime through the **management of physical space** is a significant **ecological** strategy. Examples include:

- **Newman's** (1996) concept of **defensible space** that involved allowing residents to control the physical environment around their homes using a mix of "real and symbolic barriers and improved opportunities for surveillance".

- Alleygate projects that limit access to *outsiders* on housing estates: locked gates to which only residents have the key stops offenders gaining access to houses and escaping through a maze of alleys.
- CCTV surveillance has also become a familiar sight in many towns, cities and individual properties.

Evaluation

Power and Tunstall's (1995) longitudinal study of "twenty of the most unpopular council estates in the country" provides significant empirical evidence to support administrative approaches. They found changes to the physical environment, such as defensible space and improved street lighting, reduced many forms of offending.

Similarly, **Town** (2001) suggests measures such as CCTV surveillance do *not* result in offenders moving their activities to areas without such measures (**crime displacement**).

Osborn and Shaftoe (1995), however, argue the evidence for **crime reduction** is not clear cut: physical measures reduce the **fear of crime** rather than *crime itself*. Reductions in crime are a **statistical artefact** produced by people:

- "Feeling safer", so they:
- define less behaviour as criminal and so:
- report fewer crimes.

They conclude policy interventions in 'traditional areas of concern' – relieving poverty, reducing inequality and supporting family life – provide **better long-term solutions** to crime reduction.

A further criticism of cultural strategies such as **criminal profiling** - where the police build-up pictures of *typical known criminals* - is that they result in some groups being targeted as "potential criminals". The police discover more crime among the target groups, which confirms their initial profiling and feeds into continued profiling to create a **self-fulfilling prophecy**.