

Does Any Relationship Exist Between Poverty And Crime?

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to examine whether there is a relationship between poverty and crime. This paper seeks to compare crime rates with poverty rates and other relevant economic indicators. This study examines poverty and crime rates across various countries. The paper draws upon data from both developed and developing nations, as well as regional data from across the globe. First, data from the United States of America is analysed, followed by an analysis of data from a high-crime country such as Venezuela. Subsequently, the United Nations regional data is analysed. The study concludes that poverty has a relationship with crime, but poverty is not the sole factor causing crime; other factors are also involved.

Keywords: Poverty rate, Crime rate, United Nations, developed and developing countries.

1. INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a very big social problem and it has a great impact on people in this society. Illiteracy, disease proliferation, infant mortality, and social polarization are some impacts of poverty. Poverty directly influences the lifestyle of human beings and it can also influence an individual's decision-making. Therefore, it is evident that poverty exerts immense pressure on individuals. This pressure can restrict a person's ability to grow and may push them toward criminal activities. This paper will compare year-wise poverty rate and crime rate data and analyse the relationship between them. For this study, data will be collected from both developed and developing countries across the globe. Additionally, data related to high per capita income nations and low per capita income nations will also be considered for analysis. We can establish that a relationship exists between poverty and crime, when the poverty rate increases, the crime rate also tends to increase and when the poverty rate decreases, the crime rate also tends to decrease. These comparative studies aim to establish whether a correlation exists between poverty and crime.

2. TRENDS

2.1 First, we will present data for the United States showing the average poverty rate and violent crime rate for the decades 1970-1979, 1980-1989, 1990-1999, and 2000-2009.

TABLE:1

DECADE	AVERAGE POVERTY RATE (%)	AVERAGE VIOLENT CRIME RATE (PER 100000)	AVERAGE PROPERTY CRIME RATE (PER 100000)	TOTAL CRIME RATE (PER 100000)
1970-1979	11.8	466.8	4501.2	4968.0
1980-1989	13.8	600.4	4952.1	5552.5
1990-1999	13.8	685.2	4348.6	5033.8
2000-2009	12.5	475.2	3403.8	3879.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Historical Poverty Tables (Poverty)¹, FBI², Bureau of Justice Statistics (Crime Data)³.

** The data mentioned in the table above has been collected from the aforementioned websites, sources and has been rounded off for better clarity.

Upon examining the data, it can be inferred that there is a correlation between poverty and crime. When poverty levels rise, crime rates also tend to increase and when poverty levels decline, crime rates show a corresponding decrease. An analysis of this data suggests that poverty is not the sole cause of crime. There are several other contributing factors. Thus, poverty is not the only factor influencing crime rates. The United States is considered a developed country. The mindset and psychology of people living in a developed country differ from those living in a developing country. Therefore, we should also consider an example from a developing country.

2.2 After analysing the data of a developed country such as the United States, we will now shift our focus to a country with a high crime rate. We will examine the relationship between crime rates and poverty rates in that country. Venezuela serves as a suitable example for this study.

TABLE:2⁴⁵⁶⁷⁸⁹

¹U.S. Census Bureau, *Historical Poverty Tables: People and Families*, tbl.2 (Poverty Status of People by Family Relationship, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1959 to 2023), <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-people.html> (last visited Aug. 11, 2026).

²Fed. Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, *Uniform Crime Reporting Program Data: Crime in the United States (1970–2020)*, <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s> (last visited Aug. 11, 2026).

³Bureau of Just. Stat., U.S. Department of Justice, *Historical Crime Data and Analysis Tools*, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/data/data-analysis-tools> (last visited Aug. 11, 2026).

⁴ Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales, Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, *Encuesta Nacional de Condiciones de Vida (ENCOVI)* (various years 2019–2024).

⁵ Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia (OVV), *Informe Anual de Violencia* (various years 2019–2023).

⁶ Venezuela, *the Face of Poverty*, Alianza (2020), <https://alianza.shorthandstories.com/the-face-of-poverty/index.html>.

⁷ Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia, *Informe Anual de Violencia 2019*, <https://observatoriodeviolencia.org.ve/news/informe-anual-de-violencia-2019/>.

⁸ PROVEA, *La Pobreza en Venezuela Llega al 94,5% de la Población | ENCOVI 2021* (Sept. 29, 2021), <https://provea.org/actualidad/derechos-sociales/la-pobreza-en-venezuela-llega-al-945-de-la-poblacion-encovi-2021/>.

⁹ Swissinfo/EFE, *Venezuela Acumula 2.328 Homicidios este Año, 25% Menos que en 2021, dice ONG* (Dec. 29, 2023), <https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/venezuela-acumula-2-328-homicidios-este-a%C3%B1o-25-menos-que-en-2021-dice-ong/48169324> (reporting 2021's total violent-death rate of 40.9 as the prior-year comparator; the report did not break out a separate criminal-homicide rate for 2021, only the raw count of 3,112 homicides).

YEAR	POVERTY RATE (% OF HOUSEHOLDS, INCOME POVERTY)	CRIME TOTAL DEATHS (PER 100000)	RATE-VIOLENT (PER 100000)	CRIME CRIMINAL HOMICIDES ONLY (PER 100000)
2019-2020	96.3	60.3		24
2021	94.5	40.9		Not available
2022	81.5	35.3		8.8
2023	82.8	26.8		7.5
2024	73.2	26.2		Not available

Source¹⁰¹¹¹²¹³¹⁴¹⁵: During this period, Venezuela lacked a reliable official statistics agency providing data on either poverty or crime. Therefore, the table above relies on two independent sources widely accepted by international researchers and journalists as standard substitutes: ENCOVI, a university-run household survey for poverty data and OVV, an NGO that tracks violent deaths.

After analysing this data, it is evident that there is a relationship between poverty and crime. However, poverty is not the sole factor influencing crime, as multiple factors contribute to its occurrence. Venezuela has one of the highest crime rates in the world, and an attempt has been made to determine whether a relationship exists between crime and poverty. Having analysed the data for Venezuela, we will now examine data from different regions across the globe. The definitions of poverty used will be based on the criteria established by global organizations.

2.3 After examining the data for Venezuela, we will now attempt to determine whether a relationship exists between poverty and crime. For this purpose, we will study regional data obtained from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

TABLE:3

REGION	MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY HEADCOUNT RATIO (UNDP MPI)	INTERNATIONAL HOMICIDE RATE PER 100000 POPULATION (UNODC)
Sub-Saharan Africa	53.4%	12.7
Latin America & the Caribbean	5.5%	15
South Asia	18.2%	3.8

¹⁰Efecto Cocuyo, *Pobreza se Reduce en Venezuela pero Aumenta la Desigualdad, según la Encovi 2022* (2022), <https://efectococuyo.com/la-humanidad/encovi-2022-pobreza-se-reduce-aumenta-desigualdad-migracion-ucab/>.

¹¹ Swissinfo/EFE, *supra* note 6 (reporting 2022 figures directly).

¹² Bitácora Económica, *ENCOVI: Pobreza Extrema se Redujo 14 Puntos Porcentuales en 2024* (2025), <https://bitacoraeconomica.com/encovi-pobreza-extrema-se-redujo-14-puntos-porcentuales-en-2024-pero-todavia-mas-del-70-de-los-hogares-tiene-pobreza-de-ingresos/> (reporting 2023 as the prior-year comparator).

¹³ Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia, *OVV Violence in Venezuela Annual Report 2023*, <https://observatoriodeviolencia.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/OVV-Violence-in-Venezuela-Annual-Report-2023-.pdf>.

¹⁴ Bitácora Económica, *supra* note 9 (reporting 2024 figures directly).

¹⁵ Statista, *Venezuela: Homicide Rate 2014–2024* (Mar. 26, 2026), <https://www.statista.com/statistics/984669/homicide-rate-venezuela/> (citing InSight Crime; this figure reflects the total violent-death measure, not a criminal-homicide-only rate).

Arab States/ Middle East & North Africa	15.7%	4.2
East Asia & Pacific	3.5%	1.8
Europe	<1.5%	2.2
North America	(High-income, excluded from MPI)	6.4
Oceania	4.1%	2.9

Source: United Nations Development Report¹⁶, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime¹⁷¹⁸

From the data analysed, it can be observed that Sub-Saharan Africa has a Multidimensional Poverty Headcount Ratio of 53.4%, while Latin America and Caribbean has a ratio of only 5.5%. The international homicide rate per 100,000 population for these two regions is 12.7 and 15, respectively.

If there were a directly proportional relationship between poverty and crime, the region with a higher poverty rate would also have a higher crime rate. However, this data contradicts that assumption. Although Sub-Saharan Africa has a significantly higher multidimensional poverty rate than Latin America and the Caribbean, its homicide rate is lower.

Therefore, it can be concluded from this data that there might be a relationship between poverty and crime, but poverty is not the sole determinant of crime. After studying the data, it can be said that there are other factors that also contribute to crime.

3. CONCLUSION

In this study, while identifying whether any relationship exists between poverty and crime, poverty and crime data have been analysed for a developed country like the United States, a developing country with a high crime rate such as Venezuela, and region wise data from the United Nations Development Report and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. After examining the data of the United States of America, we can deduce that there is a relationship between poverty and crime. From the data of Venezuela, we can deduce that poverty is related to crime, but the relationship is not directly proportional. From the data in Table 2, it can be observed that the poverty rate was 81.5% in 2022 and 82.8% in 2023, while the crime rates were 8.8 and 7.5 respectively. Thus, it can be inferred that although the poverty rate increased in 2023, the crime rate decreased. From the regional data of the United Nations Development Report and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, we can see that in the South Asia and Arab States regions, the Multidimensional Poverty Headcount Ratios are 18.2% and 15.7% respectively, and the International Homicide Rates (per 100000 population) are 3.8 and 4.2. From this data, it can be observed that when the poverty rate is decreasing, the homicide rate is not decreasing. Therefore, poverty and crime are not directly proportional. From this data, we can conclude that poverty and crime are related; however, poverty is not the sole determinant of crime. There are other factors as well. Addiction, lack of education, unemployment, and diverse psychological traits also play a significant role in causing crime. If

¹⁶U.N. Development Programme & Oxford Poverty and Human Dev. Initiative, *2025 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI): Overlapping Hardships: Poverty and Climate Hazards* 6–13 (2025).

¹⁷ U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Study on Homicide 2023: Trends, Contexts, Drivers*, U.N. Sales No. E.24.IV.1 (2023).

¹⁸U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, *UNODC Research: Data Portal (Homicide Statistics)*, United Nations, <https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-intentional-homicide-victims> (last visited Aug. 21, 2026).

we try to decrease the poverty rate, reduce unemployment, and balance the other determinants, the crime rate can also be decreased, and we can make a better society.