

4

Violence and Crime



NEWS UPDATE

- Three white vigilantes who were convicted of killing unarmed Black man Ahmaud Arbery were convicted of hate crimes two years after the first trial. To support the charge of a hate crime, prosecutors showed the jury about two dozen text messages and social media posts in which the men used racial slurs and made derogatory comments about Black people. Their contempt for Blacks is unnerving. (February 22, 2022)
- The governor of California, who placed a moratorium on executions three years ago, is dismantling the nation's largest death row by moving condemned prisoners to other prisons. According to the Corrections Department spokeswoman, "We are starting ... to repurpose and transform the current housing units into something innovative and anchored in rehabilitation" (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*, February 23, 2022).
- The study based on World Health Organization data and published by the medical journal *Lancet* reported that 27% of the world's women and girls ages 15–49 have experienced domestic violence by an intimate partner over the time period 2000–2018 (February 19, 2022).
- According to the Centers for Disease Control, opioid overdose deaths tripled among U.S. teens overall and increased by five times for Black teens in particular over the last two years (Madison Muller and Ella Ceron, Bloomberg News, February 23, 2022).
- At least 30 Historically Black Colleges and Universities have received bomb threats during January and February 2022, perhaps in response to Black History Month.

PURPOSE

Your students will be especially interested in the topics of this chapter, beginning with the violent insurrection on January 6, 2021, and ending with drug abuse, the overdose deaths of their favorite musicians, and the policies used to address drug abuse. In fact, violence is presented as “enabling and perpetuating our nation’s structural foundations of inequality and racism.” And while students will find the topics quite timely and interesting — including the issues of Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, hate crimes, and mass shootings — they will also find the use of economic theory and tools quite interesting in these contexts. These include the concept of public goods and services, social cost-benefit analysis, the price elasticity of demand (and extended elasticity topics in Appendix 4–1), and the use of excise taxes as a policy tool. You’ll note I’ve avoided the “marginal benefits equal marginal cost” framework for policy evaluation, as it is abstract and unnecessarily technical at this course level. See if you agree that social costs and benefits are still managed well.

WHAT'S NEW?

1. Updated data reveal that while violent crimes rates have largely fallen since 1990, they rose in 2020 and may have been rising since. (You can look this up at www.fbi.gov.) There are indications that gun murders are occurring in our major cities at record levels.
2. Black Lives Matter has been discussed in several previous editions to this textbook, but the movement took on greater urgency after the killing of unarmed Black man George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020 by a white police officer. The scene was videotaped and streamed around the world with Floyd repeatedly saying, "I can't breathe," triggering a global resurgence of Black Lives Matter and anti-racism protests. The intensity of the anti-racism moment is new. Beware of responses like "All Lives Matter," which are the conceptual equivalent of "race neutral" policies. They do not address the issue of white privilege.
3. New material addresses prison and criminal justice reform.
4. As mentioned in Chapter 3, hate crimes are not new, but they are increasing in number, and they are increasingly targeted against Asian Americans amid the coronavirus pandemic. Also new is that people are assaulting flight attendants, healthcare personnel, teachers, school board members, politicians, and government officials over the coronavirus and racism.
5. Former President Donald Trump displayed his racism, over and over, whether it was in his Muslim travel ban, his disparagement of immigrants and developing countries, or his support for white supremacists that ranged from neo-Nazis in Charlottesville to the Proud Boys in the Capitol on January 6, 2021. This type of racism has persisted for generations, but what is new is that it is now out in the open and seems to be far more acceptable than in the past. Indeed, it seems rampant among politicians, federal and state legislatures, and public figures. The violence that coincides with racism seems to be justified by some and trivialized by others. It is difficult to comprehend how the violence we all witnessed with horror before our own eyes in our nation's Capitol is being retold as if it were insignificant.
6. Of course, material on the coronavirus pandemic is new. This is especially relevant to the discussion of drug abuse, as the stress associated with the pandemic, the increased isolation, and the shutdown of some support groups has raised the dangers of drug abuse.
7. Once again, the *Viewpoint* section is especially important, as it not only presents the views of those on the economic left and the economic right, but also the populist ideology, which is linked to white supremacy, authoritarianism, and therefore, violence.
8. Finally, the *Viewpoint* section is also important because it distinguishes between economic and social viewpoints on the left and the right, especially with regard to the legalization of drugs. An economic conservative will theoretically prefer that the government stay out of the market for illegal drugs (or simply legalizes them), whereas a social conservative will want the government to keep them illegal. The economic conservative may also prefer market-oriented policies to limit drug use, such as excise taxes.

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

➤ *Student Interest*

- Ask the students if they participated in any antidrug programs in high school. Then ask if they think the programs were effective. Do they have better ideas? This and other topics of student interest in this chapter are great ways to stimulate discussion early in the course. The entire chapter may serve this role.
- The material on the legalization of drugs is controversial. I am careful not to discourage a variety of views on the subject. (For example, some students might suggest that legalization would reduce the demand for drugs because the allure of the “badness” is gone. Reinforce their use of logic by recognizing that this is indeed a possibility.)
- The legalization of marijuana is of special significance to students, especially as more and more states make recreational use legal. Research is being conducted to determine the degree to which marijuana impairs driving.
- Ask your students to read the police reports on their local news sites to see what crimes are being committed. In my small college town, underage drinking, marijuana possession, shoplifting, public urination and vomiting, and domestic abuse seem to dominate. My university charges students for the harassment of squirrels!
- Discuss the statement made by lawyer Bryan Stevenson: “I believe that each person is more than the worst thing they’ve ever done.” How does this apply to incarceration and even the death penalty?
- There has been a rash of politicians and other leaders stepping down after being accused of insider trading when they first learned of the severity of the coronavirus before the rest of the population. Students may be interested in the definition of insider trading and why it is harmful. Ask your students whether they perceive white-collar crime to be less serious than the other forms of crime they’ve considered.
- Ask your students whether there is truly such a thing as a “victimless crime”?
- Students will appreciate the “extras” in the text, including a poem about George Floyd’s murder, an essay by a young Black man about gun violence, and the list of musicians and actors who have died of drug overdoses.
- The section *To the Student* can assist students in finding treatment for themselves or a friend.

➤ *Controversy*

- It’s difficult to present material on global, racial, and ethnic diversity without risk of embarrassment to some students, especially if those students are in a small minority within the class. As in Chapter 3, we need to be careful not to single out individual minority students and not to assume they represent all students within their group.
- It is also difficult to address white supremacy in the Trump and post-Trump era without triggering strong emotions and potential conflict among our students. The same is true as the Republican party increasingly reveals itself to be the party of white supremacy. It may be helpful to shift the focus from overt racist behavior (such as hate crimes and use of the n-word) to activities and policies that promote and protect white privilege (such as the use of redlining and zoning restrictions to keep African Americans from moving into white neighborhoods). Institutional racism (and overt statistics) is less likely to create defensiveness among our students.

- In March 2021, Governor Ralph Northam signed a bill banning the death penalty, making Virginia the first of the old Confederate states to do so. Northam cited a long history of racial disparity in the way the death penalty had been applied in the state, with Black defendants far more likely to be executed than white ones. Virginia Senator Scott Surovell stated that the connection between the lynching of Black men and the advent of the death penalty was “undeniable.” Discuss with your students what he means by this.
- Supporters of the death penalty argue it deters others from capital crimes. However, the experts reject this argument. What do your students think about this? Ask them what they think about the moral, ethical, and economic considerations of the death penalty?
- In January 2022, former President Donald Trump announced at a rally that “the left is now rationing lifesaving therapeutics based on race, discriminating against and denigrating ... white people to determine who lives and who dies. If you're white, you don't get the vaccine or if you're white, you don't get the therapeutics.” This, of course, is untrue and racist. There are plenty of vaccines, though too many people are choosing not to get vaccinated. The one case where race is allowed as one of many considerations is with a New York state policy that targets limited oral antiviral treatments toward those at greatest risk, which in many cases includes racial and ethnic minorities due to long-standing health and social inequities. You might want to ask your students why Trump would make a statement such as this.
- Ask your students about the case of the unarmed Black man Ahmad Arbury, who was killed by three white men who observed him jogging and believed he was a robber. Arbury's killers were charged and convicted of murder. How is this a modern-day version of the widespread “vigilante justice” in the era that followed slavery?
- Similarly, what do your students think about the acquittal of Kyle Rittenhouse, who was among other counter-protesters who swarmed into the city of Kenosha, Wisconsin, following the police shooting of a young Black man. Rittenhouse openly carried his military-style semi-automatic rifle through the city and was charged with the intentional shooting of two demonstrators.
- The late Gwen Ifill, a Black newscaster with the PBS Newshour, coined the phrase “missing white women syndrome.” I added this to the text at a time when the nation seemed riveted on the news of a missing white woman. It struck me as particularly relevant after I'd been reading about the frequency with which Indigenous women go missing and the lack of publicity they receive. You may want to discuss this with your students.

► *Economic Theory and Models*

- When we describe public goods and services as being non-rivalrous, indivisible, and non-excludable, we know that in the extreme sense, these characteristics do not hold. For example, if I sit in a library, it doesn't stop you from being there as well. But if hundreds of us sit in the library, well then, it really is too bad for you. You can discuss this with students.
- The chapter utilizes social cost-benefit analysis, both for crime prevention activity and for the death penalty. We can explain to our students that even if we cannot place monetary values on many social costs and benefits of crime prevention activity, we should nevertheless be aware of them. For example, the social cost of capital punishment in the case of wrongful convictions, or the social cost of an assault on a young man in prison, may be more important than many of the costs we are able to monetize.
- This chapter presents a good opportunity to reinforce student understanding and application of production possibilities and opportunity costs, where increased spending on prisons is crowding out state funding for education, healthcare, and other goods and services.

- Students also have the opportunity to practice using demand and supply and the concept of price elasticity of demand in relation to the use of illegal drugs. The subject matter will make this interesting to students.
- Students will also likely be interested in government policy with respect to illegal drugs, including everything from the war on drugs to clean-needle programs and proposals that drugs be legalized and dispensed at pharmacies.
- Your students may enjoy the discussion of additional elasticity concepts in the appendix to the chapter, including the concepts of perfectly elastic and inelastic demand and supply curves.
- Please encourage your students to re-draw all the graphs from the chapter so they can be confident in their understanding of these models.

► *Data and Terminology*

- Be sure to clarify that a public good or service can be provided directly by the government or can be paid for by the government and provided by a private entity. For example, the government can issue food stamps, but the purchases come from a private grocery store. You might want to consider a public prison versus a private prison. What are some of the concerns about private prisons, especially “for profit” ones? What about public schools versus private ones?
- Students may need an explanation from you about the age-adjustment of data and why this is necessary in assessing violent crime rates.
- Please continue to encourage your students to review their class notes on a daily basis and to learn the definitions in the margins.

► *Fundamentals*

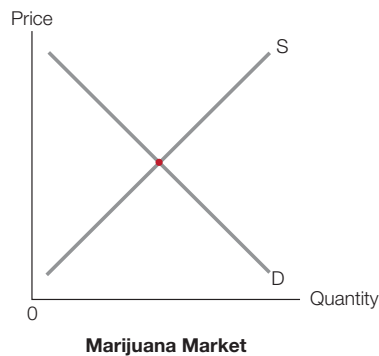
- It is stated in this chapter that violence enables and perpetuates our nation’s structural foundations of inequality and racism. You may wish to discuss this with your students.

CLASSROOM EXERCISES

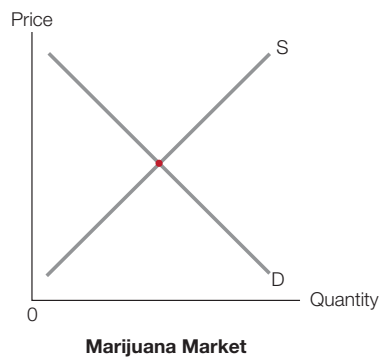
1. Consider the following production possibilities curve, and show the change that has occurred over time in state government purchases. [A movement from A to B.]



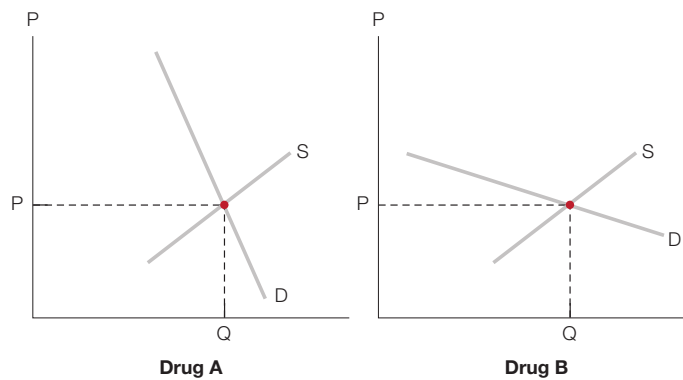
2. In the graph of the market for marijuana below, shift the curve to show what happens if government efforts to reduce demand are effective. [A backward shift in the demand curve.] What would happen to usage? [Decrease] To price? [Decrease]



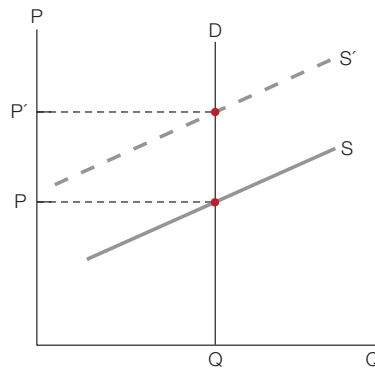
3. In the graph of the market for marijuana below, shift the curve to show what happens if government efforts to reduce supply are effective. [A backward shift in the supply curve.] What would happen to usage? [Decrease] To price? [Increase] Since we get different results in the graphs in questions #1 and 2, what can we say about the overall change in usage when both types of policy are effective? [It decreases.] What can we say about the change in price? [It depends on the relative shift of each curve]



4. Which of the demand curves below is likely to be the demand curve of a casual drug user [B], and which is likely to be the demand curve of an addict? [A] In which case would legalization (represented by an increase in supply) result in the greatest increase in usage? [B]



5. (*Appendix 4-1*) Shift the curve that would occur in the following market for opioids if demand were perfectly inelastic and the government imposed an excise tax on opioid sales. [Supply would shift backward, as shown.] What is the effect on the equilibrium price of opioids? [Increase] On the equilibrium quantity bought and sold? [No change]



SAMPLE TEST QUESTIONS

Multiple Choice Questions

- Which of the following is an example of a public good?
 - car insurance
 - a private hospital
 - national defense**
 - mobile phone
- A neighborhood group initiates a “neighborhood beautification” program of planting flowers and trees. Ella doesn’t take part in the program, but she enjoys the greater beauty the program provides. The economic term for Ella is a:
 - smart consumer.
 - free rider.**
 - busy person.
 - economic citizen.
- A characteristic of a public good is that it is:
 - indivisible.
 - non-rivalrous.
 - nonexcludable.
 - all of the above**
- A so-called victimless crime is defined as one that is:
 - not particularly violent.
 - only against property.
 - the result of consensual dealings between responsible adult persons.**
 - the result of coercion of a weaker person by a stronger one.

5. Which of the following is considered by some people to be a victimless crime?
- pornography**
 - arson
 - rape
 - murder
6. “The use of a good by one person doesn’t prevent its use by others” describes:
- indivisible.
 - non-partisan.
 - nonexcludable.**
 - none of the above
7. The best way of evaluating crime prevention programs from an economic perspective is to look at their:
- deterrent effects.
 - benefits and costs.**
 - number of prosecutions.
 - popularity with the public.
8. Which of the following countries has the highest incarceration rates?
- the United States**
 - Cuba
 - Russia
 - Thailand
9. Drug addicts are likely to have a highly _____ demand while recreational users are more likely to have a _____ demand.
- elastic, inelastic
 - inelastic, elastic**
 - flat, steep
 - flexible, rigid
10. Which of the following movements on the production possibilities graph might represent changes in U.S. choices between crime prevention and other goods and services over recent decades?



- from A to B**
- from B to A
- from C to D
- from D to C

11. A decrease in the supply of illegal drugs will cause a very small reduction in equilibrium quantity (usage) if demand is:
 - a. horizontal.
 - b. elastic.
 - c. inelastic.**
 - d. none of the above

12. Approximately which share of people ages 12 and over used marijuana within the last year, according to the government survey cited in the text?
 - a. about 10%
 - b. about 33%
 - c. about 50%
 - d. about 18%**

13. Most of our expenditures for the War on Drugs are on:
 - a. programs to educate young people about the dangers of drug use.
 - b. programs to decrease the supply of drugs.**
 - c. drug rehabilitation.
 - d. "safe-needle" programs.

14. According to the text, most hate crimes occur in the category of:
 - a. race, ethnicity, and ancestry.**
 - b. sexual orientation.
 - c. religion.
 - d. disability (usually mental illness).

15. Until recently, violent crime rates have:
 - a. fallen steadily.**
 - b. risen steadily.
 - c. remained remarkably constant.
 - d. been highly variable, rising and falling greatly from one year to the next.

16. Among crime prevention activities, the area with the most rapidly rising spending is:
 - a. police protection.
 - b. the judicial system.
 - c. the prison system.**
 - d. drug education and rehabilitation.

17. Which of the following countries has the highest incarceration rate?
 - a. Russia
 - b. Cuba
 - c. Belarus
 - d. the United States**

18. The text discusses violence in the context of:
- hate crimes.
 - politics.
 - the coronavirus.
 - d. all of the above**
19. An editorial in the text describes how Minneapolis:
- is becoming a peaceful city.
 - b. is becoming a "graveyard."**
 - has entirely defunded the police.
 - has never experienced the death of an unarmed Black man at the hands of police.
20. A poem in the text describes how the poet is upset by:
- the police officer's hand in his pocket.
 - the police officer's knee on the victim's windpipe.
 - a Black man calling for his mother.
 - d. all of the above**
21. In a study cited in the text, the share of American and Canadian women that have been physically or sexually assaulted by a current or former partner is about:
- 10%.
 - b. 25%.**
 - 50%.
 - 87%.
22. "Missing white women syndrome" especially ignores:
- white women who go missing.
 - b. Native American women who go missing.**
 - the needs of the children of white women who go missing.
 - the role of white men.
23. People seeking criminal justice reform have made suggestions for:
- police policy changes.
 - retail policy changes.
 - prison policy changes.
 - d. all of the above**
24. Which of the following would be considered "white-collar crime"?
- financial mismanagement and corruption
 - illegal lobbying of corrupt politicians
 - insider-trading
 - d. all of the above**
25. Afghanistan has a relatively high rate of:
- business bribery.
 - business theft.
 - white-collar crime.
 - d. all of the above**

26. What do the following have in common: Chris Cornell, Scott Weiland, Prince, Kurt Cobain, and Jimi Hendrix?
- They are musicians who ran for political office.
 - They were unarmed and killed by police.
 - They were victims of “vigilante justice.”
 - They died of drug/alcohol overdoses.**
27. Those on the economic right:
- support the legalization of drugs.
 - favor market-oriented approaches to drugs, including excise taxes.
 - support less government involvement than those on the economic left.
 - all of the above**
28. (*Appendix 4-1*) A perfectly inelastic demand curve is:
- perfectly vertical.**
 - perfectly horizontal.
 - downward sloping but not perfectly vertical or perfectly horizontal.
 - a concave curve to the origin.
29. (*Appendix 4-1*) The coefficient of the price elasticity of demand is calculated as:
- the percentage change in quantity demanded from a percentage change in price.
 - the percentage change in quantity demanded from a percentage change in income.
 - the percentage change in quantity demanded and supplies from a percentage change in the costs of production.
 - all of the above**
30. (*Appendix 4-1*) A perfectly inelastic demand curve:
- has a price elasticity of demand equal to zero.
 - is more likely to apply to a highly addictive drug than one that is less addictive.
 - shows a price increase with an excise tax, but no change in quantity.
 - all of the above.**

True / False Questions

- The War on Drugs is universally thought to be a success. (F)
- All experts agree that pornography is a victimless crime. (F)
- The legalization of drugs could be accompanied by ways to increase their safety. (T)
- Carefully conducted studies reveal that our policies to reduce the supply of drugs are quite effective. (F)
- The legalization of drugs could reduce the role of organized crime in the drug trade. (T)
- Surprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic reduced mental illness and drug abuse. (F)
- Violent crime rates have been largely decreasing in recent decades. (T)
- Spending on criminal justice system has increased in the last several decades. (T)
- The largest increase in spending on the criminal justice system is on prisons. (T)
- Theft is usually considered a victimless crime. (F)
- Most of the individuals in jail on drug charges are violent members of organized crime syndicates. (F)

12. Economists argue that crime prevention activities should be evaluated by cost-benefit analysis. (T)
13. When the data are adjusted for the age distribution of the population, results indicate a relatively small amount of crime is reduced by “get-tough” policies. (T)
14. Expenditures on the criminal justice system have been an increasingly large percentage of state budgets over time. (T)
15. The limitations associated with provision of a public good or service is an example of a market failure. (T)
16. The U.S. incarceration rate is not high by international standards. (F)
17. Donald Trump was the first president to declare a “war on drugs.” (F)
18. The so-called victimless crimes are the result of consensual transactions between responsible adults. (T)
19. It is impossible to be simultaneously a social liberal and an economic conservative with regard to so-called victimless crimes. (F)
20. Economic conservatives are more likely to favor the legalization of drugs than are economic liberals. (T)
21. All benefits of crime prevention activities are easy to quantify. (F)
22. Economists agree that it is efficient to spend any amount on crime prevention activities so long as we decrease the crime rate by doing so. (F)
23. Russia has the highest incarceration rate in the world. (F)
24. Most hate crimes in the United States are committed on the basis of religion. (F)
25. Studies mentioned in the text demonstrate that it is cheaper to utilize the death penalty than a life-sentence in prison. (F)
26. According to the text, white-collar crime is relatively minor and decreasing steadily in the United States. (F)
27. Criminal justice reformers advocate for guardian training over warrior training. (T)
28. Studies have shown that it is very easy to prevent illegal drugs from entering the United States; the problem is that we haven't tried very hard. (F)
29. Longer prison sentences for the use of crack cocaine than for powdered cocaine have negatively affected the sentencing of Blacks. (T)
30. If policy effectively reduces both the supply of and the demand for illegal drugs, we know the outcome will be lower quantities (usage) and lower prices. (F)
31. According to the text, convicts and guards have a very personal and supportive relationship that assists the convict once released from prison in Sweden. (F)
32. (*Appendix 4-1*) A complementary good is one that is used to substitute for another good. (F)
33. (*Appendix 4-1*) An excise tax imposed in the case of a perfectly inelastic demand curve will cause a very large reduction in equilibrium quantity (usage). (F)
34. (*Appendix 4-1*) The income elasticity of demand refers to the responsiveness of consumers to any change in income. (T)
35. (*Appendix 4-1*) The cross-price elasticity of demand refers to the responsiveness of consumers of one good to any change in the price of another good. (T)

Critical Thinking Question

Critically evaluate the argument for decriminalizing marijuana. Will your analysis be different if you uncover evidence that marijuana is a “gateway drug”? What if it is shown to cause birth defects or miscarriages? What if it is shown to cause increased automobile accidents?