# The Public Health Approach to Violence Reduction

## Stories, Movements, and Hope

ALISTAIR FRASER, LUKE BILLINGHAM,
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### Alistair Fraser
*Professor of Criminology, Scottish Centre for Crime & Justice Research, University of Glasgow*

### Luke Billingham
*Youth worker, Hackney Quest*
*Research Associate, Open University*

### Fern Gillon
*Research Associate, Strathclyde University*

### Keir Irwin-Rogers
*Senior Lecturer in Criminology, The Open University*

### Susan McVie
*Professor of Quantitative Criminology, School of Law, University of Edinburgh*

### Tim Newburn
*Professor of Criminology and Social Policy, London School of Economics*

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*To the Wise Men*

# Series Editors' Preface

The Clarendon Studies in Criminology series aims to provide a forum for outstanding theoretical and empirical work in all aspects of criminology and criminal justice, broadly understood. The Editors welcome submissions from established scholars, as well as manuscripts based on excellent PhD dissertations. The series was inaugurated in 1994, with Roger Hood as its first General Editor, following discussions between Oxford University Press and Oxford's then Centre for Criminological Research. It is edited under the auspices of three centres: the Institute of Criminology at the University of Cambridge, the Centre for Criminology at the University of Oxford, and the Mannheim Centre for Criminology at the London School of Economics. Each supplies members of the Editorial Board and, in turn, the Series General Editor or Editors.

In *The Public Health Approach to Violence Reduction: Stories, Movements, and Hope*, Alistair Fraser, Luke Billingham, Fern Gillon, Keir Irwin-Rogers, Susan McVie, and Tim Newburn offer an authoritative and timely contribution to ongoing debates about how best to address youth violence. In recent years, the public health approach has been hailed as a transformative solution, offering a framework that emphasises prevention, collaboration, and a recognition of violence as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon. Yet, as the authors of this book demonstrate, the reality of implementing such approaches is often more complicated than policy statements and political rhetoric suggest.

This book traces the trajectory of the public health approach to violence—especially youth violence—by examining its past, present, and current challenges. Focusing on Scotland and England, the authors compare how a shared idea has evolved along divergent paths, shaped by contexts that share much in common yet differ in important ways. In doing so, they explore the potential and the limitations of the public health model and consider the conditions under which policy can move beyond rhetoric to produce meaningful change. At its core, the book offers not only analysis

but also a search for a criminology of hope—one that connects policy to lived experiences and points towards new possibilities for reducing violence. We are pleased to welcome the book into the Clarendon Studies in Criminology series.

Paolo Campana and Kyle Treiber
General Editors
Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge
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# Acknowledgements

How did six people write a book? Dear reader, read on.

The words that spill over these pages result from our collective labours over the course a four-year study, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ES/T005793/1). From the outset, the intellectual core has been intensely collective—a monthly reading group, regular team coding and analysis sessions, and co-produced panel sessions at both UK and international conferences—and the practice of team writing is therefore one that flows from the existing project itself. The project was an iterative, ongoing collaboration, either as co-investigators or research associates, and it felt only fitting that we should carry this practice forward to final publication. In so doing, we are actively contributing to an emerging literature in criminology that seeks to deconstruct what Sandberg and Rojas (2021) term the myth of the 'lone hero researcher', in which a fiction of individual brilliance is projected onto the reality of collective work, often at the expense of contracted research staff. It was this collective spirit that kept the shared project alive, even as we wrote by candlelight amid a power cut and snowstorms in Penrith. Well, that and Tunnock's teacakes.

We have accrued numerous debts over the course of the project, and beyond. Some are financial: we are immensely grateful to the ESRC, both in terms of the initial award and subsequent IAA grants from both Glasgow and Open Universities, and to both UKRI and LSE for supporting the costs to make the text available via Open Access. Some are organizational: we would like to extend our gratitude to the Violence Reduction Units, especially Will Linden from the Scottish VRU, and the many others who contributed, supported, and facilitated access. Particular thanks are due to Medics Against Violence, Family Action in Rogerfield and Easterhouse (FARE), Possibilities for Each and Every Kid (PEEK), and G20 in Glasgow; and Southwark Young Advisors, Waltham Forest Young Advisors and Hackney Account in London. Others are disciplinary: we wish to give a heartfelt thanks to the audiences and participants in successive meetings of the European Society of Criminology (Malaga and Florence), and British Society of Criminology (Preston and Glasgow) for their welcome

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# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ASBO | Anti-Social Behaviour Orders |
| CIC | Community Interest Company |
| CIRV | Cincinnati's Initiative to Reduce Violence |
| CIRV | Community Initiative to Reduce Violence |
| ESRC | Economic and Social Research Council |
| FARE | Family Action in Rogerfield and Easterhouse |
| GEAR | Glasgow Eastern Area Regeneration Project |
| GERA | Glasgow East Regeneration Agency |
| GIRFEC | Getting It Right for Every Child |
| IAA | Impact Acceleration Account |
| LSE | London School of Economics |
| LVRU | London Violence Reduction Unit |
| MATs | Multi-Academy Trusts |
| MAV | Medics Against Violence |
| MOPAC | Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime |
| MVP | Mentors in Violence Prevention |
| NKBL | No Knives Better Lives |
| NPM | New Public Management |
| PEEK | Possibilities for Each and Every Kid |
| PHYVR | Public Health, Youth and Violence Reduction |
| RCTs | Randomized control trials |
| SCJS | Scottish Crime and Justice Survey |
| SCRS | Scottish Crime Recording Standards |
| SVRU | Scottish Violence Reduction Unit |
| UKRI | UK Research & Innovation |
| VRU | Violence Reduction Unit |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |
| YEF | Youth Endowment Fund |
| YOTs | Youth Offending Teams |
| YVC | Youth Violence Commission |
| ZTP | Zero Tolerance Policing |

# 1
# Introduction

Changing Violence?

## Parallel Tragedies

On Sunday, 17 October 2021, the city of Glasgow was jolted awake by news
of a sudden, tragic death. After a Saturday afternoon visit to McDonald's,
a fourteen-year-old boy and his friends were on their way home to
Coatbridge, a former mining town eight miles east of Glasgow, when the
attack occurred. In the weeks that followed, an image of the boy became
ubiquitous: dark hair gelled forward, clad in a bright blue tracksuit and
gleaming white Nikes. Balloons were released in a local park in his memory,
accompanied by the words 'fly high'. At a European fixture at Celtic Park,
the crowd honoured a minute's applause; fourteen minutes in, marking
each year of his short life. A week later, the police arrested a suspect, aged
sixteen.

The death sent shockwaves through a city that had in recent times be-
come more accustomed to news stories about violence reduction. Shaking
off nearly a century of 'No Mean City' stereotypes, Glasgow had recently be-
come an international success story for a fresh approach to violence, termed
the 'public health' approach. With its origins in the United States (Mercy
et al., 1993) and subsequently promoted by the World Health Organization
(World Health Organization, 2017) the public health approach frames
violence involving young people not as an individual pathology, but as a
public health issue, requiring an epidemiological response in which inter-
ventions are tested, evaluated, and scaled up (World Health Organization,
2021). In Scotland, the approach was championed by the Scottish Violence
Reduction Unit (SVRU), a small team of police officers and analysts tasked
with reducing the epidemic levels of knife crime and homicide. Over time,
from a point when Scotland was reported as 'the most violent country in the

developed world' (Guardian, 2005), police recorded crime statistics showed a sustained reduction in non-sexual violent crime across Scotland until the year 2015 (Scottish Government, 2016), with a particularly marked decrease in Glasgow (Fraser et al., 2024).

A month after this death, with tragic synchronicity, another fourteen-year-old boy was fatally stabbed by a sixteen-year-old outside a train station. This time, however, it was London not Glasgow that woke to the news. The boy had been out for a walk with his brother in his hometown of Croydon, a former market town nine miles south of central London. Unlike in Glasgow, the tragedy was far from isolated. His was the youngest of thirty teenage lives lost to violence in London that year, often with a knife. Both Sky News and the Guardian newspaper printed images and stories of each victim. The boy's image is a close-up, looking off-camera, looking young, and not posing for the camera, short braids just visible. His father was quoted as saying, 'Men are lucky to make the age of twenty one these days because of the level of violence. How can we live like that?'

In the years running up to 2021, prompted by public outcry over the loss of young lives, the UK Government had—like the Scottish Government—begun to draw on the language of public health in designing responses to violence, often with explicit reference to the Glasgow example. Like the 'New York miracle' before (Zimring, 2007) which led to the exportation of the so-called 'broken windows' model of policing, the public health approach became increasingly hailed as a panacea to rising knife crime, seeking to shift the emphasis away from the symptoms of violence and towards root causes (House of Commons, 2018). By 2023, twenty further Violence Reduction Units had been created in England and Wales, alongside the foundation of a £200m Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) tasked with leading systemic changes in violence prevention over a ten-year period.

The ongoing tragedies of young lives cut short, both north and south of the border, are an important reminder that neither version of public health approach has been successful in preventing violence involving young people, and that there remains a gulf between policy-making decisions and the streets they purport to affect. In both cases, the assailants were boys, aged sixteen at the time of the attack who, it emerged during subsequent trial, had both experienced recent trauma. One was described at trial as a vulnerable young man who had previously been identified as a victim of modern slavery in a County Lines drug operation. The other had been embroiled in a series of conflicts between rival groups and had recently witnessed a brutal machete attack.

This book seeks to chart a path for the public health approach to violence involving young people by analysing its past and present, and applying this to the contemporary dynamics of violence involving young people. To do this we compare the genesis, evolution and impact of public health approaches to violence involving young people in Scotland and England, comparing these policy discussions with the everyday realities of violence as it affects young people. Despite obvious similarities between the two nations—a shared parliamentary system, currency, and language—we trace the divergence in the development of public health approaches. As the light represented by the public health approach entered the prism of national political systems, it refracted and split into separate beams. We trace the path of this beam of light as it moves through parallel systems, drawing out insight not only into the possibilities of the public health approach to violence, but also the conditions under which a policy idea may or may not result in meaningful change, in search of a criminology of hope.

## The Public Health Approach to Violence Reduction

The safety of young people from violence is a fundamental issue around the world. In addition to the high financial costs—in England and Wales, estimated over the last eleven years at approximately of £11 billion (Irwin-Rogers et al., 2020b)—violence involving young people takes a heavy toll on societal, community, and familial well-being. Violence can have serious consequences, not only for those directly involved, but for families, friends, and communities. The World Health Organization estimate that 43% of global homicides involve people aged 10–29, with many more affected by non-lethal forms of violence (World Health Organization, 2016). But non-fatal injuries also produce serious and wide-ranging adverse effects. Survivors of violent injury can suffer from prolonged periods of trauma and heightened anxiety that may result in further violence. As a recent study demonstrated, victims of repeat violent victimization are also frequently perpetrators of violence (Batchelor and Gormley, 2023). A constant background of violence in the community—what has been described as 'ambient violence' (Barbarin et al., 2001)—can result in an atmosphere of fear and mistrust, increasing the likelihood of further violence.

Against this backdrop, governments across the world have sought to design policies and interventions that reduce, prevent, or mitigate violence

between young people. In recent years, an increasing consensus has developed in the United Kingdom regarding the so-called public health approach to violence reduction. Based on John Snow's pioneering work on cholera in the nineteenth century, this approach seeks to treat the 'upstream' causes rather than responding to the 'downstream' symptoms (Tulchinsky, 2018). Since its first discussion in the 1980s by Surgeon General C Everett Koop in the United States, calling on public health professionals to 'respond constructively to the ugly facts of interpersonal violence' (Mercy et al., 1993: 7), the public health approach to violence was subsequently adopted by the World Health Organization and the Surgeon General of the United States (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001), who noted that the 'the public health approach offers a practical, goal-oriented, and community-based strategy for promoting and maintaining health' (2001: 200). More recently, the public health approach has been used as a foundation for violence prevention initiatives that target early intervention, multi-agency working, and prevention, drawing on principles drawn from epidemiology and health (Braga and Kennedy, 2021).

   Recent scholarship on public health approaches to violence reduction have distinguished between three distinct approaches (Rosbrook-Thompson et al., 2024). The first, involving a literal interpretation of violence as a communicable disease, is referred to as the 'clinical epidemiological' model. Associated primarily with the Cure Violence initiative, both in the US and internationally (Cure Violence, n.d.; Slutkin et al., 2018), the clinical epidemiological approach has attracted criticism for its positioning of violence as an individual pathology (Riemann, 2019; Brotherton, 2023). For Riemann (2019: 146), such clinical models reflect a 'neoliberal rationality of governing that disentangles violence from structural factors and explains violence solely by reference to individual pathology'. Rather than a medicalized interpretation of violence as disease, the second strand of work leans on the principles and practices of population health, which Rosbrook-Thompson et al. (2024: 5) refer to as a *methodological* approach. This approach, popularized by the World Health Organization (2021), seeks to apply the 'test and learn' logic of health evaluation to violence interventions, consisting of four main steps:

1. To define the problem through the systematic collection of information about the magnitude, scope, characteristics and consequences of violence.

2. To establish why violence occurs using research to determine the causes and correlates of violence, the factors that increase or decrease the risk for violence, and the factors that could be modified through interventions.
3. To find out what works to prevent violence by designing, implementing and evaluating interventions.
4. To implement effective and promising interventions in a wide range of settings. The effects of these interventions on risk factors and the target outcome should be monitored, and their impact and cost-effectiveness should be evaluated.

Despite the clarity of this approach, rooted in a multi-faceted understanding of violence, it is worth noting that evaluations of 'what works' in youth violence reduction are inherently challenging. Despite increased attention to public health approaches to violence reduction (Welsh et al., 2014; Williams and Donnelly, 2014), evaluative work has indicated evidence of mixed success (Hodgkinson et al., 2009; Matjasko et al., 2012; Davies et al., 2016). This is due in part to the complex and multi-faceted nature of violence. Controlled interventions and randomized trials are seldom possible in the context of violent street cultures (Braga et al., 2001). For this reason, Irwin-Rogers et al. (2025) advocate a refined version of the WHO approach that incorporates regional and national level violence prevention policies as well as programmatic interventions, including the expansion of evaluation to include qualitative methods alongside (quasi-)experimental trials.

The third, and final, application of public health approaches to violence relates to a figurative rather than literal interpretation. This approach, which Rosbrook-Thompson et al. (2024: 5–6) relate primarily to the SVRU, 'views violence as something resembling rather than constituting an infectious disease, with no concomitant focus on mechanisms of contagion or individual-level treatment'. Rather than an evaluative 'test and scale' approach, or one rooted in clinical trials, the public health approach in Scotland has been characterized as a 'whole-system, cultural and organisational change' (Youth Violence Commission 2018) that is less amenable to the forms of cause-and-effect demanded by evaluative approaches (Stevenson, 2023).

The divergence in application in public health approaches, we feel, demands the broadening of the analytical lens to grapple with the dynamics of policy movement, and the tectonics of policy change. As policy scholars have demonstrated, the movement of policy from one place to another is

seldom straightforward. As Jones and Newburn argue, in the field of crime control, policy rarely travels as 'complete packages', but rather 'are shaped by a variety of actors operating at different levels in the system', and 'mutate and change shape when introduced into different contexts from those in which they developed' (Jones and Newburn, 2019: 16). As we will go on to argue, the divergent trajectories of the public health approach to violence reduction in Scotland, England and Wales reflect differences in institutional culture and administrative bureaucracy (Cairney and St Denny, 2020). Before doing so, however, we will first introduce the data and methods on which this argument is based.

## Data and Methods

This book is based on data drawn from the ESRC-funded project 'Public Health, Youth and Violence Reduction' (PHYVR),[1] which ran from 2020– 2024. The study sought to 'follow the policy' (Peck and Theodore, 2012) of public health approaches to violence reduction as they moved through different scales of political process in Scotland and England, combining methods 'on the move' with methods 'in place', understanding policy movement as both relational and territorial (McCann and Ward, 2011: xv). This involved, primarily, detailed qualitative interviews with 109 key actors in violence reduction in Scotland (n=37) and England (n=72), including key actors from within politics, policy-making, public sector and community organizations at different scales ranging from the local to the national. Interviews were designed to reconstruct the development of the public health approach in Scotland and England 'retroactively from the adoption process back to the initial learning' (Wood, 2016: 395). Interviews sought to investigate the meanings attached to public health approaches to violence reduction in both Scotland and England, and the translation of these interpretations at the level of practice. Mindful of the significant differences in the occupational cultures into which the idea was entering, we took seriously the role of contested 'power and personalities' (Wood, 2016: 391) and varying forms of 'resistance or skepticism' (Baker and McCann, 2020: 4). Interviews were supplemented by observations at meetings, events, and

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[1]  Award number: ES/T005793/1. See https://changingviolence.org [accessed 10 June 2025].

workshops in an effort to situate interviews within the 'assumptive worlds' of policymakers.

Running alongside these qualitative methods, the study compiled and interrogated a wide range of secondary data. This involved, first, an extensive secondary data analysis on police recorded crime in Scotland and England over a twenty-year period. To examine trends in different types of violence over time, police recorded crime data was examined for Scotland and England and Wales, focusing on Glasgow and London in particular. Bespoke requests were made to Police Scotland and the London Metropolitan Police for data that was not otherwise publicly available. The secondary data on violence trends, which used modelling techniques to offer a fine-grained analysis of recorded violence, were used to triangulate and probe trends identified in qualitative interviews (Bannister et al., 2018; McVie et al., 2019). Second, the study involved a detailed documentary analysis which examined the emergence and development of public health approaches to violence prevention in Scotland and England (Schwarze, 2023). The sources covered by the analysis included policy documents, legislation, official statements, public and third sector reports, and outputs from mainstream and social media.

In addition to individuals working within the space of violence reduction, from the outset the study engaged directly with individuals and communities affected by violence. We carried out forty three interviews across Glasgow (n=25) and London (n=18) with community leaders, youth practitioners, and other grassroots groups, a period of participant-observation with community-based youth organizations, and focus groups and interviews with a further thirty seven young people living in communities affected by violence. This data was intended to analyse the everyday experiences of violence at community level, the extent to which public health approaches can be identified at a local level, and the degree to which explanations offered at levels of policy and practice were attuned to the contemporary context. Finally, we carried out an ongoing, eighteen-month action-research project with a group of four young men, who we refer to (at their request) as the 'Wise Men'. This strand of work involved the co-production of a violence reduction youth work resource, and represented a central thread that connected different components of the project.

In total, the study involved 194 participants. Throughout, we draw extensively on the words and experiences of participants. Though many opted to

waive anonymity, in the text we use simple labels to distinguish the position from which participants speak.[2]

## Stories, Movements, and Hope

Since the 'narrative turn' in social science, analytical approaches that centre and probe the storied nature of individual subjectivity have become increasingly prevalent (Alexander, 2003). In the field of criminology, recent years have seen a resurgence of interests in the significance of stories in 'instigating, sustaining, or effecting desistance from harmful action' (Presser and Sandberg, 2015: 1), mining the 'deep stories' (Hochschild, 2016) of crime that circulate. Drawing from a diverse theoretical foundation that moves from ethnomethodology to 'techniques of neutralisation' (Sykes and Matza, 1957), narrative approaches connect the storied construction of crime and harm with individual belief-structures and self-justifications. Complementing the 'strong program' in cultural sociology which interrogates the enduring role of storytelling in cultural life (Alexander, 2003; Polletta, 2006), these studies bridge between individual narratives of harm and the deep-rooted stories of crime that reverberate in society. In the process, the analytic gaze has broadened to include not only those in conflict with the law but also those who create, impose and police it, as well as the wider significance of stories of crime in the justice system (Annison, 2021).

   In this book, we engage with this literature to trace the significance of stories and narrative in the emergence and transfer of the public health approach to violence reduction. As we will argue, storytelling became an important conduit through which messages pertaining to early intervention and prevention travelled through otherwise disparate social environments, building a collective movement that spanned multiple domains. As Polletta (2006) has demonstrated, storytelling is crucial to the formation of social movements—such as those relating to violence reduction—as a means of clarifying and articulating clear messages that actors across multiple fields can receive and interpret. At the same time, however, we probe the limits of storytelling within differing sociocultural milieus. While storytelling represented a vital force in driving what has been termed a 'quiet revolution' in policy-making (McAra and McVie, 2025), there were spaces into which

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   [2] All interviews are freely available for download via the UK Data Service, Study Number 9255: https://ukdataservice.ac.uk [accessed 10 June 2025].

stories could not reach. In making sense of these different impacts, we draw on a second cluster of ideas revolving around the concept of movement.

To date, in the field of criminology, policy movement has occupied a relatively marginal position, focusing largely on comparative penal policy (Garland, 2001), with studies of policy transfer confined to the study of a single case (Blaustein, 2015; Steinberg, 2016). By tracing the development of the same policy idea in two differing jurisdictions, we seek to balance existing studies of 'policy transfer' in criminal justice (Newburn, Jones and Blaustein, 2018; see also Tonry, 2015) with nascent debates in the fields of 'policy mobility' (McCann and Ward, 2011, 2012), which draws attention to the movement of ideas in an age of rapid policy flow (Peck and Theodore, 2012). In so doing, we draw particularly on the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu. Though Bourdieu wrote comparatively little on 'those empirical issues that vex criminologists' (Shammas, 2018: 202), his concepts have become increasingly germane to studies of crime and justice and have started to pool in what has been termed a putative 'Bourdieusian criminology' (Fraser and Sandberg, 2025). Here, we apply the concept of 'field' to two primary domains of violence—policy and the street—in an effort to analyse the conditions for change in each. By analysing the dynamic interaction between these two environments, we analyse the social dynamics within both the worlds of policy-making and communities affected by violence, ultimately seeking to prise open the 'space between' these fields (Eyal, 2013), offering an analytical account of how and why the public health approach to violence developed differently in Scotland and England. In so doing we contribute to existing theoretical work in comparative criminology, while offering further elaboration of concepts from narrative criminology within the vocabulary of Bourdieu (Fleetwood, 2016; Sandberg and Fleetwood, 2017).

In recent years, one of the most striking pressures that has driven policy-making decisions in both Scotland and England—and internationally—is the emphasis on individual responsibility and marketization that have emerged under the logic of neoliberalism (Hay, 2007; Stedman-Jones, 2014; Burgin, 2015). The logic of neoliberalism, founded on the privileging of market principles in the provision of public services, contributed to the adoption of a cluster of audit-based principles that grouped under the term 'New Public Management' (NPM) (Hay, 2007; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). While the meaning of the term is contested, scholars have referred to emphasis on performance targets, inspection, and audit; the introduction of internal competition within public sector departments; the creation of

'quasi-markets'; and the 'contracting out' of services to the private or volun-
tary sector, via competitive tendering (Hood, 1991; Walsh, 1995; Dunleavy
et al., 2006; De Vries and Nemec, 2013; Caffrey, Ferlie and McKevvit, 2019).
Notably, however, some scholars have flagged divergence in the extent
and reach of NPM among policymaking in Westminster and Holyrood,
with Scotland adopting a more holistic mode of policymaking indicative
of a 'strategic state' (Elliott, 2023). In both contexts, however, these shifts
have taken place against the backdrop of increasing financial constraint.
Financial cuts to the public sector, often referred to under the banner of
austerity, began in the wake of the 2008 financial crises but over the course
of the following ten years began to bite deeply, both north and south of
the border. For example, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has estimated that
austerity measures resulted in a 6% fall in Scottish Government funding
between 2010/11–2017/18 (Phillips, 2021). The grants English councils re-
ceive from central government were halved in size between 2010 and 2019
(BBC, 2019), and youth provision suffered a 70% cut in England and Wales
during the same period (Weale, 2020). Policies such as the bedroom tax and
benefit cap have resulted in increases in excess mortality in a way that has
been described as 'social murder' (Walsh and McCartney, 2024).

In the midst of resurgent fears of violence involving young people, and
an abiding sense of 'permacrisis' emerging from neoliberal austerity, we
offer an analysis of the emergence of public health approaches to violence as
a case study in possibility for alternative futures. As Les Back argues, hope
requires not only an ability to 'take in and live with the trouble, the damage
and the wreckage' (2021: 18) but the active sustenance of a 'worldly atten-
tiveness to what is emerging in the conditions of the present as they are
carried into the future' (2021: 5). In seeking out this positionality, we draw
on Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic revolution' to assess the successful elab-
oration of a social movement for change. As Bourdieu argues, the relative
autonomy of the symbolic order 'can introduce a degree of play into the
correspondence between expectations and chances and open up a space of
freedom' (Bourdieu, 1997: 234). In the case of symbolic revolutions, move-
ments for social change, for Bourdieu, most often emerge under specific
conditions, involving impending crisis, the emergence of 'outsider' leaders
with mass appeal, and the reinterpretation of canonical sources to reframe
public debate (Petzke, 2022). Here, we analyse the emergence of the public
health approach to violence reduction in Scotland and England as more-or-
less successful efforts to mobilise a symbolic revolution of this kind. Setting
this seed of hope in dialogue with a grounded analysis of contemporary

violence for young people, we end with a call for 'permanent revolution'. While the impact of austerity has brought material disadvantage and cultural reproduction to the fore, these comments also allow the potential for alternative futures to be imagined.

## Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 will map the contours of international, national, and community scales at which policy change occurs. On one hand, classical accounts of policy change stress the significance of *national* policy levers and bureaucratic mechanisms, and the emergence of policy 'windows' through which change might occur (Kingdon, 1995). On the other, contemporary accounts of policy mobility stress the dynamic, fluid and cross-national movement of ideas as they enter national jurisdictions at different scales bridging the transnational and the local (Peck and Theodore, 2012). Through exploration of case studies such as zero tolerance policing and school exclusion, the chapter seeks to offer an assessment of the interaction between these levels in the field of violence reduction. Further, by introducing the national policy contexts of Scotland and England, the chapter begins to elaborate a model which recognizes the interplay of transnational and national forces in the scope of policy change, and the divergence of public health approaches between the United States and the United Kingdom. Finally, the chapter sets out the need to examine the community contexts in which violence occurs, to ground accounts of policy and practice in place. In sum, the chapter argues for the need for a scalar approach to policy movement that incorporates transnational, national, and community scales of analysis, and the need to understand these scales relationally by connecting policy-making with local effects (Fraser, 2017).

    Chapter 3 builds on this analysis by introducing a conceptual framework through which to apprehend the movement and grip of violence reduction policy. Drawing on the Bourdieusian concept of 'field', which delineates the operation of semi-autonomous domains of social life, the chapter analyses the drivers of change within the spheres of both 'policy' and 'street' fields (Bourdieu, 1984). Focusing on the interaction between governing structures derived from political economy, and the role of individual actors in achieving social transformation, the chapter introduces the concept of 'symbolic revolution' (Bourdieu, 2017) as an explanatory frame for the movement for public health approaches to violence reduction in Scotland

and England. Finally, the chapter engages with Bourdieu's later work *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu et al., 2019) to bring focus to the 'street' fields of Glasgow and London (Shammas and Sandberg, 2016), assessing the extent to which policy can realistically be said to effect change at a local level, and how change itself might be conceived at individual and systemic levels. The subsequent chapters apply these concepts to empirical data in Scotland and England.

Chapters 4 and 5 apply the concept of symbolic revolution (Bourdieu, 2017; Petzke, 2022) to the emergence of the public health approach to violence reduction in Scotland. Exploring the role of crisis, reframing of discourse, and charismatic leadership in Scotland's journey in violence reduction, the chapter offers a detailed timeline of events in Scotland's violence reduction journey, incorporating key decisions, actors, and organizations. Chapter 5 then analyses the significance of data and narrative in establishing legitimacy for the 'success story' of violence reduction in Scotland. While evidence of effectiveness of the public health approach is complex, in this chapter we argue that its appeal lies less in concrete evaluation and more in its storied character. In so doing, the chapter seeks to answer the call of Fleetwood and colleagues to turn the narrative gaze toward the powerful stories told by criminal justice agents (Fleetwood et al., 2019: 16) while seeking to analyse the 'structural conditions' (Polleta, 2006) under which these narratives came to predominate.

Chapters 6 and 7 compare the development of a symbolic revolution in Scotland with the evolution of public health approaches in England. Chapter 6 analyses the crisis of violence involving young people in England in the period 2015–2018, with the subsequent emergence of a cross-party group that were able to leverage a 'space between fields' (Eyal, 2013). By retracing this development—during which the public health approach was a fragile and emergent paradigm in England—the chapter takes seriously the social, institutional, cultural, and political barriers to policy change (Baker and McCann, 2020: 4). Chapter 7 explores the unfolding politics of public health approaches to violence reduction in England in the period 2018–2023, with a particular focus on the influence of established techniques of governance such as New Public Management (Power, 1999; Hood, 2007), focusing on how such techniques of governance shape the activities of VRUs and other violence reduction agencies in England. Among other effects, these modes of governance limit the potential for storytelling and charismatic actors.

Chapter 8 examines the relationship between policy-making and the street based environments in which they purport to intervene. Against assumptions of straightforward policy effect, the chapter positions violence involving young people within the domain of the 'street field', which adheres to its own internal norms and logic, in tension with those in policy domains. First, drawing on community data in Glasgow and London, the chapter explores the gap between policy rhetoric and the actions of 'street level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 2010) charged with its application. Second, drawing on the voices of young people affected by violence alongside those of frontline practitioners, the chapter outlines the contemporary dynamics of violence in Glasgow and London, seeking to identify both commonalities and differences. Finally, the chapter assesses the degree of 'fit' between current policy rhetoric and everyday dynamics in the 'street field', offering an account of 'polycrisis' and the need for 'permanent revolution'.

Chapter 9 then draws out central theoretical and empirical themes from the preceding chapters and offers a set of practical and policy implications. Specifically, the chapter integrates the theoretical and empirical findings on policy mobility with the contemporary picture of violence presented in chapter 9 to pose a simple question: 'where do we go from here?' In answering the question, we offer a series of future directions for scholarship, policy and practice. In this, we seek to extrapolate our arguments pertaining to multi-scalar policy movement of public health approaches to other jurisdictions internationally.

Threaded throughout these chapter, we tell the story of the group of young men who worked alongside us throughout the project. Written in the second person, it is told from the perspective of our team to the group. Though not directly connected to the broader narrative of the book, it represents an important foundation for what follows.

# IN THE SCIENCE ROOM

We first met in the science room at the school. Ali had been in a few weeks before, sitting in on a session with your youth worker. There were more of you then. Ten, maybe twelve. So many that they had to split you into groups to try and keep the peace.

I knew before meeting you that you had been through a lot. You were fourteen and had just lost a close friend, how could that not have an impact. I'd brought all the things I'd usually bring to meet a new group. Crisps, cans of juice, a football. Just things that might break the ice, make you feel comfortable. I didn't have a clear idea of what we were doing. All I knew was that you were in need and I wanted to do what I could.

Your worker thought that meeting me in two big groups was too much so he split you into pairs. I remember you coming in two by two like Noah's Ark. The room we were in was terrible for doing any kind of youth work. It was a science room. High tables, those chairs with the really long legs. The kind of room that stresses teachers out, puts them on their guard. Gas taps and bunsen burners, accident waiting to happen.

You swaggered in, half-arsed. Another adult coming to talk to us, you probably thought. Just what we need. One of you had your hood right up, cords pulled tight to your face. Another had just a pure attitude, like I'm not doing this shit. Eyes hard, telling me in no uncertain terms to fuck right off. I remember thinking you and me are not going to get on, which is funny because we ended up getting along just fine. You were the youngest, probably that had something to do with it.

Anyway the first thing I did was move the tables. It didn't feel right so I thought what the hell and just shifted them. I remember you all loved that, you were absolutely buzzing at playing with a football in the science room. Just hyper. So much so that the exercise I'd planned about justice never really happened. But some of you got it, I could see you looking at me and thinking. One of you said that injustice is being banned from the tech corridor for no reason.

When I collected in the Post-It notes at the end I was surprised how much we had covered. Even you who said nothing and stared back at me had been scribbling away. It stuck with me that the school isn't a safe space. You felt excluded not just in the streets but in the school. That never sat right with me. I've seen the way some of the teachers talk to you, digging you up at every opportunity. It's no wonder you kick back.

I remember sitting there in the empty science room after, all the tables mixed up, just amazed. When I left I was buzzing, I knew there was something there, something special. But I remember thinking fuck, I'm gonna really need to pull some magic out the bag to get you to open up and trust me.

# 2
# Scaling Policy Movements

## Introduction

Despite commonalities in the causes and consequences of violence world-wide, rates of recorded crime demonstrate substantial variations in the rates of violence in different jurisdictions. In some large global cities like Hong Kong, rates of homicide are less than one per 100,000; in others like Mexico City, the rate is more than ninety per 100,000 (UNODC, 2019). In this context, governments across the world have sought to design policies to prevent violence between young people—ranging from so-called 'Mano Dura' ('strike hard') policies in Latin America, involving mass imprisonment of identified gang members (Wolf, 2017), to varied efforts at early intervention, diversion from prosecution or 'scared straight' programmes (Muncie, 2011). These similarities flow from national governments attempting to grapple with comparable social trends, often drawing on policies developed elsewhere that may be transportable. However, as Sapiro has noted, the transnational policy field does not take place on an even surface. Models of circulation, exchange and transfer are 'largely determined by the unequal power relationships between central and peripheral countries (or between dominant and dominated ones)' (Sapiro, 2018: 168), with the United States often acting as a central node.

Against this backdrop, an increasing level of criminological research activity has focused on the movement of policies between jurisdictions, and the extent of their impact in the receiving country. Existing research has focused on the study of cross-national policy flows, which has grown from an initial focus on comparative penal policy (Christie, 2000; Wacquant, 1999, 2001, 2009; Garland, 2001) to a broader interest in the flow of criminal justice policy and practice (Newburn and Sparks, 2004), policy learning in

policing (Mulcahy, 2005; Steinberg, 2011), sentencing (Karch and Cravens, 2014), prisons and imprisonment (Jones and Newburn, 2007; Pakes and Holt, 2017), community punishments (Brown et al., 2016; Canton, 2006), mandatory sobriety schemes (Bainbridge, 2019), and harm reduction policies (Baker et al., 2020). Most recently, studies have begun to take seriously the non-linear movement of ideas in an age of 'fast policy' (Peck and Theodore, 2012). This literature draws from the emergent field of policy mobility which grapples with the rapid movement of policy ideas in the age of social media, while grounding these flows in more prosaic domestic politics that are also implicated in the reconfiguration of policy ideas within particular jurisdictions (Newburn, Jones and Blaustein, 2018; see also Tonry, 2015).

In this chapter, we aim to develop a scalar approach to policy movement. In political geography, scale refers to an attentiveness to the way that political power maps onto physical space, specifically as it crosses between varying territorial geographies (Jonas, 2015). As Jonas summarizes, such a scalar approach focuses attention on the allocation of power 'across, within, and between the state's territorial structures' (Jonas, 2015: 26) including local, regional, national, and cross-national scales. In the context of policy movement of the public health approach to violence reduction, in this chapter we explore the scaling of policy at three primary scales— transnational, national, and local—while remaining mindful of the potential for new sites of activity to emerge. As Cox (1998) has argued, scale is a site of contestation, and in the struggle for preventive approaches to violence, organizational actors have sought to rescale activity at a local or national level.

The chapter will be set out in four sections. The first, on transnational policy flows, situates the violence reduction space as a transnational policy field in which the United States exerts particular influence (Sapiro, 2018). We illustrate this through the construction of the so-called 'New York miracle' of violence reduction, and subsequent international mobility of the zero tolerance policing (ZTP) model (Newburn and Jones, 2007). The second section focuses on the national political contexts in Scotland and England into which these policy ideas entered. Here, we outline historical differences in systems of policy administration, and specifically youth justice, between Scotland and England, as a starting point to understand the divergent evolution of public health approaches north and south of the border. In the third section, we focus attention at the local scale to begin an appreciation of both similarity and difference in the dynamics of street

based violence that such policies are responding to. Though Glasgow and London are, on the face of it, very different urban environments, there are important similarities that have a bearing on young people's experiences of violence. The fourth applies this scalar analysis to the development of two specific policies to Scotland and England, focused deterrence and reduction in school exclusions.

By sketching the development of the public health approach in the United States, and its subsequent transfer to the UK, Europe and beyond, the chapter will argue for the need for a scalar approach to policy movement which, as we will argue, is further enhanced via engagement with Bourdieu's concept of 'field'.

## Transnational policy flows

At the transnational level, the public health approach to violence reduction would appear, at first glance, like an exemplar of the fluid movement of ideas and identities in the transnational field of policy formulation (Go and Krause, 2016). This transnational space, approximated most clearly by scholarship in the field of policy mobilities (Peck and Theodore, 2010), draws attention to the role of 'convergence spaces' (Temenos, 2015) such as conferences, social media, and expert workshops in the spread of policy ideas. The flow of policy, in this literature, is diffuse and non-linear involving policies mutating as they are 'assembled disassembled and reassembled' (McCann and Ward, 2012: 43), and 'learning curves can be shortened—sometime dramatically ... by borrowing from a well-known model' (Peck and Theodore, 2015: xvi) to solve political problems. Given the adoption of the policy in multiple jurisdictions, the movement of these policies appears to be a case-in-point of such deterritorialized flow (Graham and Robertson, 2022). As discussed in chapter 1, however, recent scholarship has delineated important differences in the application of public health principles between jurisdictions (Rosbrook-Thompson et al., 2024), suggesting a need for critical analysis of the mechanisms by which such policies travel.

In the literature on policy mobility, the movement of policy is often mobilized by 'transfer agents' (Stone, 2004), or 'charismatic gurus' (MacLeod, 2013), who seek to mobilize knowledge by travelling from place to place as private consultants, using 'persuasive storytelling' to mobilize their policy innovations (McCann, 2011). In the existing scholarship on violence prevention, for example, frequent mention is made to

one such 'transfer agent' in the form of 'former WHO epidemiologist Gary Slutkin' (Riemann, 2019: 47), an academic-practitioner who operates a transnational enterprise in violence prevention rooted in the public health model. 'Cure Violence', as it is termed, is based on the premise that 'violence can be controlled and contained via epidemiological methods and strategies that are applied in infectious disease control', and has been applied in twenty three US cities as well as 'offshoots in multiple countries, such as South Africa, Morocco, Honduras, Argentina, and the United Kingdom' (Riemann, 2019: 147). Such 'innovators, emulators, adaptors, and circulators' (Peck and Theodore, 2015: 39) have a lengthy history in the field of youth violence in the UK (Muncie, 2001), but have arguably become increasingly prominent. However, as a number of critics have pointed out (Aspholm, 2020; Brotherton, 2023), the medicalized model that underpins Cure Violence not only has mixed evidence of success, but vital structural and cultural drivers of violence are 'obscured, if not erased' (Riemann, 2019: 151).

As numerous studies of policy movement have demonstrated, policies seldom travel as complete packages but alter and mutate as they enter differing policy environments. The comparable logic of neoliberal policy-making between the United States and other jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom creates an important point of connection between the originating and receiving policy context that facilitates transnational policy flow (Garland, 2001). Below, we discuss the example of ZTP to explore the causes and consequences of policy movement between the US and UK and beyond. Like the public health approach, ZTP originated in the US and involved charismatic figures and the language of miracles to assert narrative claims to policy innovation.

## Zero tolerance policing and the 'New York miracle'

In the 1990s, apparently staggering crime declines in New York City—referred to as the 'New York miracle'—led to widespread international interest in the city's policing practices. Despite a multiplicity of causes of the crime decline, the reduction came to be associated with the so-called 'broken windows' model of crime reduction, involving visible public order policing and targeting of low-level crime. The narrative was championed by New York's Mayor, Rudy Giuliani, and his charismatic first Commissioner

of Police, Bill Bratton, who came to act as 'transfer agents' (Stone, 2004) for its subsequent movement, as well as a number of free market think tanks, including the Manhattan Institute in the US and the Institute of Economic Affairs in the UK (Wacquant, 1999). Despite several controversies, including egregious cases of excessive force and overuse of stop and frisk (White and Fradella, 2016), the narrative of violence reduction attained widespread appeal, leading to efforts to replicate these policies internationally.[1] The list of UK 'policy tourists' included the Home Secretary, a Home Office junior minister, the Shadow Home Secretary, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, members of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, a further contingent from the Metropolitan Police including the Deputy Commissioner and the Mayor of London among others. Senior politicians on both sides of the political divide visited New York and used zero tolerance rhetoric to burnish their 'tough on crime' credentials, not least those in senior positions within New Labour who at that time were seeking to outflank the Conservative Government on law and order (Downes and Newburn, 2022).

These events led to the adoption of ZTP approaches in jurisdictions from Latin America (Dos Reis Peron and Paoliello, 2021) to Europe (de Maillard and Le Goff, 2009; Newburn and Jones, 2007; Punch, 2007), Australia (Dixon and Maher, 2005; Grabosky, 1999) and the former Soviet Union (Slade et al., 2021). Nonetheless, as many have noted, the outcome of such policy movement cannot simply 'be "read off" from the orientations and goals of sponsoring institutions in the global power centers' (Peck and Theodore, 2015: 29). In particular, a series of studies point to a contrast between the language and rhetoric of zero tolerance and its eventual impact on policy and practice. Slade and colleagues (2021) in their study of police reform in Kazakhstan, for example, found considerable claims-making surrounding ZTP, set against a backdrop of both public distrust and police inertia, meaning that in practice any attempted practical reforms tended either to be ignored or subverted. Similarly, as Jones and Newburn demonstrate, despite considerable political interest, ZTP became substantially

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[1]   Though the term 'zero tolerance' policing was seldom used, what developed was a quality-of-life policing model, which became associated with vigorous law enforcement responses to minor crime and disorder—the 'broken windows' thesis (Kelling and Wilson, 1982). Alongside this, there was a focus on the use of civil remedies against those perceived to be involved in criminal activities; public target setting in relation to crime reduction; and, linked to this, new managerialist forms of intra-department police accountability, using a system called Compstat (Bratton, 1997).

altered in its movement from the US to England. Put simply, practices were often shaped by local context and, consequently, often varied quite substantially in terms of their form and impact (Hathazy, 2013). Even where evidence of transfer of elements of policy content and instruments could be found, they had undergone substantial revision and reshaping in their new political and cultural context, with the consequence that what developed tended to be very different from its precursor. While policy ideas may ascend rapidly in a transnational policy landscape where actors are in constant dialogue, when rescaled into routine bureaucracies they must adhere to established rhythms.

There are instructive conclusions that can be drawn from the example of ZTP for the study of the policy movement of public health response to violence reduction. First, the transnational movement of the policy was premised not on clear-cut data, but on a statistical reduction in crime, with an accompanying explanatory narrative led by highly visible, charismatic political leaders. In the case of New York—as in Glasgow—it was not just the reduction in violence that was considered remarkable, but the fact of its prior reputation for violence (Zimring, 2012; Davies, 2007). Second, the New York story was anchored to a definable policy instrument, namely zero tolerance policing. The fact such approaches had led to positive change in such difficult circumstances was then used, explicitly in the case of New York, as the basis for arguing that similar changes ought to be possible elsewhere. As Bill Bratton (1996) argued in relation to New York's crime decline, 'if you can do it here, you can do it anywhere'. To put it differently, stories and narratives perhaps travel more easily than policies.

As has been argued, in the contemporary age of 'fast policy' (Peck and Theodore, 2015), policy innovations circulate rapidly, quickened by the interconnectedness of global policy networks, the centrifugal force of US policy, the comparability of current social problems, and the underpinning logics of New Public Management (Hood, 1991). Nonetheless, despite appearances, the movement of policy most often operates at the level of narrative rather than that of practice. Even in an apparently clear-cut instance of policy transfer, ZTP, existing research has demonstrated the variability in the sphere of application, and reconfiguration at the national level. This suggests the need to attend more closely to comparing the significance of the scale of national politics in the movement of public health approaches to violence. In what follows, we outline similarity and difference in the Westminster and Holyrood Parliaments, and associated policymaking environments, in order to apprehend the diverging journeys that public

health approaches to violence reduction took as they entered into these parallel systems.

## Comparative national politics

The entry of the public health approach to violence into two neighbouring jurisdictions, within a comparable policy cycle, presents a unique opportunity to understand the role of national scale in shaping the subsequent development and impact of public health approaches to violence reduction. 'Following the policy' in this way allows alterations and revisions to become a central point of analysis, revealing as they do important political dynamics, cultural histories, and 'embedded institutional legacies' (McCann, 2011: 109). As Peck and Theodore argue, 'the journeys that policies make are worth following… tracing emergent policy mobilities across distended networks of relationally connected sites, and accounting both for dominant patterns and trajectories of transformation, but also for unscripted deviations and alternative mutations' (Peck and Theodore, 2015: 29). As we will see, in the case of public health approaches to violence reduction, there were failures as well as successes, and 'unscripted deviations' that are worthy of further investigation. Studying the movement of policy, however, also requires analysis of the 'preconscious, taken-for-granted interpretive frameworks' through which such ideas are filtered (Schalet, 2011: 14). If policies are stories, we also need to attend to their fields of perception and reception.

Scotland and England are—like England and America—two nations separated by a common language. While the two are geographically proximate, there are clear points of historical, social, and political divergence (Muncie, 2011; Goldson, 2014). The 1707 Acts of Union which united both nations into a single kingdom preserved Scotland's distinctive legal system while ceding decision-making authority to the Westminster Parliament. The two nations therefore retained separate legal traditions, and associated bureaucracies, while operating under the same political jurisdiction (Eliott, 2023). In addition to long-standing differences in systems of law and public administration, the devolution of power to the Holyrood Parliament in 1999 added further complexity to the levers of difference that separate the two nations. The Scottish Parliament at Holyrood was designed to encourage minority government, where consensus is prioritized (Elliott, 2023), with the electoral system involving a combination of first past the

post and proportional representation, and the Parliament itself designed in a shared arc as opposed to the oppositional benches of Westminster. Unlike Westminster, there is no second chamber equivalent to the House of Lords. Importantly, the patterns of 'policy learning' among the policymakers is similarly divergent. While Scottish policymakers often look to the Nordic or Celtic nations, embodying welfare-led social policy in small-nation contexts, civil servants in Westminster more commonly draw on policy networks in the United States (Cairney and St Denny, 2020).

These administrative and historical points of difference have led commentators to suggest important differences in the institutional cultures through which policymaking is imagined and made. Housden (2014: 70), for example, describes the UK Government as 'a much larger and complex machine than the Government of Scotland', with the Westminster system more rooted in adversarial politics and the Scottish Parliament more consensus-led. This has implications in particular for how policies progress across the stages of talk, decisions and action (Pollitt, 2001). Similarly, Mooney et al. (2015: 208) suggest that Scottish criminal justice is 'small and well connected', with one of their participants, an MSP, noting that 'organizations whether legal institutions, pressure groups, academics or others [ … ] know people's phone numbers, email addresses and [ … ] probably [ … ] know which bar they can bump into people'. However, as Cairney and St Denny (2020) attest, it is important to avoid the pitfalls of binarized ideal-types. Policymaking is a complex field involving multiple, polycentric networks and 'territorial policy communities' (Cairney and St Denny, 2020) where 'similar policymaking pressures undermine different policymaking "styles"' (Cairney and St Denny, 2020: 23). Indeed, Elliott (2023) has suggested that the incursion of New Public Management approaches to policy-making has been more constrained in Scotland, mitigated by unifying 'whole-of-society' policies that Elliott terms the 'strategic state' (Elliott, 2023: 79).

In analysing the significance of national scale in the development of public health approaches to violence reduction in Scotland and England, in this section we offer two examples that illustrate key points of distinction that will sharpen analysis in subsequent chapters. The two examples selected, of youth justice systems and New Public Management, may appear only indirectly linked to violence reduction. Nonetheless, we suggest that they offer an important insight into the 'cultural logic' through which policies are developed in the two political contexts, which can 'give certain decisions and practices the appearance of cognitive, emotional, moral, and

practical commonsense' (Schalet, 2011: 14). As such, these examples allow a vital glimpse of the national scale that these policies entered into, splitting into divergent streams as they settled into established logics and political arrangements.

## Youth justice

Historically, Scotland's approach to youth justice has differed from that in England and Wales, a point of departure that can be traced to the 1960s, when the principles and values of what Garland (2001) has referred to as 'penal-welfarism' were at their height. In short, this constituted a departure from punitive approaches to crime and justice, and a focus on promoting the welfare of offenders and society more broadly by addressing the causes of offending. Toward the end of the 1960s, these principles and values lay at the heart of proposed reforms to the respective systems of youth justice in both jurisdictions. The outcome of these reforms, however, ultimately left the two countries on different paths.

In Scotland, the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, implemented in full in 1971, abolished Scotland's juvenile courts and introduced a Children's Hearings System which 'aimed at early and minimal intervention focused on the needs of the child' (McAra, 2017: 952). The philosophy of the Kilbrandon Committee (named after the senior judge who chaired it), which underpinned the 1968 Act (Kilbrandon, 1964), viewed 'juvenile offending and other troublesome behaviours . . . as manifestations of deeper social and psychological malaise and/or failures in the normal upbringing process' (McAra and McVie, 2010: 69). The 'welfarist' nature of the Hearings System meant that the child or young person's offending was only relevant to the extent that it related to a consideration of their needs. There were no punitive measures available to the Hearing beyond the power to order a compulsory measure of care via a supervision order. While the 'Kilbrandon' ethos has been referred to as something of a 'mythology' (Mooney et al., 2015), with more punitive elements in Scotland such as high imprisonment rates and a low age of criminal responsibility prevailing alongside, commentators have noted that the system established in Scotland 'remained in place, in a largely unchanged form, for over thirty years, and [continued to command] widespread support in professional circles' during that period (Bottoms and Dignan, 2004: 24). As we will argue in subsequent chapters, this history of braided welfarist and punitive approaches represents an

important precursor to the emergence of public health approaches to violence reduction.

In England and Wales, although juvenile courts were not abolished, the intention behind the Children and Young Persons Act 1969 was both to increase the age of criminal responsibility and to institute a system in which care was to be preferred over criminal proceedings. Political realignment, however, meant that—unlike in Scotland—these proposals were never fully implemented. A complex range of developments ensued, with the focus shifting from 'children in need' to the rediscovery of the 'deliberately depraved delinquent' and a subsequent emphasis on control (Tutt, 1981). The early 1990s saw a significant reorientation in penal politics in England and Wales, most obviously in the shape of the emergence of a new 'tough' bipartisan consensus (Downes and Newburn, 2022). This had a direct impact on youth justice, with a Conservative government announcing a range of measures—such as the introduction of Secure Training Centres—intended to display its robust credentials. Labour opposition at the time was reluctant to oppose this direction of travel in case it jeopardized its own claims to be 'tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime' (Tonry, 2013). Indeed, the competition between the two main political parties at Westminster over law-and-order politics cemented punitivism as an important strand of penal policy toward children and young people for some time to come, with a notable framing of issues of youth justice through the logic of risk-based actuarialism (Rosbrook-Thompson et al., 2024: 4). Again, this actuarial assessment represents an important narrative through which later efforts at implementing a public health approach to violence reduction would become filtered.

It is important to note that England and Wales were not alone in this resurgence of punitive rhetoric. Much of continental Europe saw changes in youth justice that were in a broadly repressive direction (Junger-Tas, 2006). There were exceptions, however, one of which was Scotland. Not only did Scotland seemingly buck the punitive trends visible in much of Europe and the US, but the Children's Hearings System 'became emblematic of a distinctively Scottish approach to crime and punishment—one which was used by politicians to reinforce a sense of national identity based on "other-to England"' (McAra, 2010: 93). Despite devolution—which might have been expected to reinforce national differences—party political alignment between a New Labour Government in Westminster and a New Labour Justice Minister in Holyrood drove a new agenda based on a 'fairly narrow emphasis on individual responsibility and personal (and parental)

accountability for the behaviour of young people, with a practice focus on correcting personal (and parental) deficits' (McNeill and Batchelor, 2004: 13–14). It is important not to exaggerate the degree of convergence, however. Despite such influences, research suggests these new logics influencing Scottish youth justice were limited in their impact, with subsequent moves towards public health approaches finding ready audiences. To a significant degree, Scotland retained much of its earlier commitment to welfarism, particularly through the cognate development of the Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) framework.

These divergences in the philosophical and practical underpinnings of youth justice represent an important foundation for understanding the subsequent divergence in the adoption of public health approaches to violence reduction at the national scale. A second point of distinction is discussed below, namely the degree to which policies clustered under the notion of New Public Management have successfully embedded.

## New Public Management

New Public Management is a paradigm for public sector reform grounded in a series of contentions about the state, originating as a critique of the post-war consensus which had held sway in the UK during the 1940s–1970s. A core component of this consensus was a belief in the state's role as a guarantor of population welfare, and, as part of this, a belief in state agencies and agents as effective providers of public good (Hay, 2007: 110–112). From the 1970s, however, this consensus was increasingly dismantled, with market principles increasingly overriding those of public service (Stedman-Jones, 2014; Burgin, 2015). This marketizing movement—which has generally been referred to as 'neoliberalism'—contained a far more critical view of public services derived from Public Choice economics, which stressed the risk of self-interested public officials (Hay, 2007). These developments fed into the emergence, in the 1980s, of the principles and practices which have become known as 'New Public Management' (NPM), embedding key marketizing assumptions about how public sector agencies needed to be reformed (Hay, 2007: 98). By the early 1990s, these ideas and assumptions 'crystallized into a more specific set of recipes for public sector reform' (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011: 9).

There are definitional disputes over what exactly constitutes NPM, but the 'core claim' of NPM is the need for more 'businesslike' practices in the

public sector (see especially Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011: 10-22). This entails, among other things: a market orientation; contracting out and privatization; and an evaluation and audit culture (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). The doctrine of NPM promotes 'the application to the public sector of management techniques developed for the private sector' through 'performance indicators' spread from think tanks in the United States to multiple jurisdictions including France and the United Kingdom (Sapiro, 2018: 164–165). While the extent to which NPM exerts an influence over policymaking in England is the subject of considerable and ongoing academic debate (Dunleavy et al., 2006; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011; De Vries and Nemec, 2013; Caffrey, Ferlie and McKevitt, 2019), it is clear that its influence can be detected more readily than in Scotland. The 'Scottish approach', by contrast, has been characterized by the centrality of a 'single vision' with cross-cutting government aims such as GIRFEC, and an outcomes-based measure of success, developed in cooperation with the public sector to address key concerns like inequality (Housden, 2014: 73–74; Elliott, 2023). As a result, some argue that NPM—and indeed neoliberalism (Bone, 2023)—has been less enthusiastically embraced north of the border.

While a number of public services in England have been subject to contracting out and privatization since the 1990s—including social care (Jones, 2015); health (Goodair and Reeves, 2022) and education (Heilbronn, 2016)—this shift has been particularly pronounced in the field of criminal justice. Increasingly, government bodies in England, such as the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office, have acted as 'commissioning agents' as opposed to direct providers of services (Corcoran, 2020). For instance, by winning competitive tenders, private multi-national corporations and third sector organizations have been contracted to deliver services in prisons and probation, with mixed results (Alonso and Andrews, 2016; Ludlow, 2014). The field of violence reduction has been no exception, with commentators referring to the formation of marketized 'industries', including the 'gang industry' (Hallsworth, 2013) and the 'knife crime industry' (Williams and Squires, 2021).

Another principle of NPM is an evaluation and audit culture in measuring success and holding delivery services to account. The idea sitting at the heart of audit culture is that the transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of public services can be increased through the systematic and rigorous evaluation of these services. Quantitative data analysis is crucial in this context, enabling the costs and benefits of public services to be scrutinized, and facilitating competition between service providers

within an open marketplace (Esmark, 2020). Audit culture appears particularly pronounced in English public administration relative to Scotland. Relatedly, Greer and Jarman (2008: 173–178) have argued that ruling politicians in Westminster tend to display low levels of trust in service providers, preferring instead to monitor their activities through quantitative evaluation. By contrast, Scottish governments have tended towards the development of more collaborative relationships with service providers, forming relationships based on mutual trust and cooperation (Greer and Jarman, 2008: 278).

The enduring components of NPM (Caffrey, Ferlie and McKevitt, 2019) within policy-making in England and Wales are one key factor in explaining why the evolution of the public health approach in England and Wales since 2018 looks different to the comparable trajectory north of the border. Though the beam of the public health approach may have arrived in both jurisdictions via transnational policy networks, it entered into political environments which refracted the light into diverging trajectories. The 'recipe knowledge' (Rock, 1995) of policymakers within the fields of Holyrood and Westminster are distinct, and as such the imaginations of likely outcomes were projected according to varying logics. As we will argue in subsequent chapters, the continued influence of NPM in England and Wales represents an important lens through which public health approaches to violence reduction came to be viewed.

The national scale of policy-making, then, is of critical significance to the analysis of public health approaches to violence reduction. Operating as a weighted, freighted set of institutional logics and historical path-dependencies, a policy idea becomes unavoidably altered as it enters the political maze. However, policy decisions operate not only at the transnational and national scales, but also the local. To apprehend the scalar movement of public health approaches to violence reduction in Scotland and England, then, it is necessary not only to recognize the national level but also the local contexts in which policy meets practice in community contexts. It is to this scale of analysis that we now turn.

## Local community contexts

In accounting for the movement of public health approaches to violence reduction in England and Wales, it is important to note that policy analysis must not stop at the level of policy 'talk' but also extend to the realm

of 'action' (Pollitt, 2001) in the communities most affected. At a community level, policy decisions taken in distant corridors are seldom tangible. In connecting the dots between the transnational scale of global policymaking with their lived effects, therefore, it is necessary to situate analysis of policy change within concrete community contexts, paying attention to the local dynamics of policy movement, and the actors engaged in efforts to rescale responses to violence at differing levels (Cox, 1998). This section elaborates these dynamics through attentiveness to the local scales of urban governance in Glasgow and London. These two cities form the focus as they represent early adopters of public health approaches to violence reduction, as hosts to the first two city-based Violence Reduction Units in the UK, and therefore offer insight into the significance of urban geography and community histories in apprehending the policy's subsequent development.

Glasgow and London are profoundly different cities. Glasgow is a city of 1.7 million people, made up of twenty three council wards, and is represented by seven Westminster MPs, alongside fifteen MSPs. It has one local authority, and one postcode area, and a single city council responsible for maintenance of local services. By contrast, London has a population of 9 million, thirty two local authorities, 625 council wards, seventy three MPs, and twenty two postcode areas, with multiple levels of governance stretching from borough to city—a magnitude and political complexity that has earned it the label of an 'ungovernable city' (Travers, 2003). As such, policy efforts at violence reduction in these two contexts must contend with a divergent series of political dynamics—be it in the transfer of policies on school exclusion (Billingham and Gillon, 2024), focused deterrence (Graham and Robertson, 2022), or indeed Violence Reduction Units themselves (Irwin-Rogers et al., 2025). Figures 2.1 and 2.2 illustrate the differing administrative structures of violence reduction in London and Glasgow, centring the VRUs as key nodes in these policy networks.

As is evident, the London VRU is nested within a complex and contained set of administrative arrangements, with governance arrangements and positioning within other organizational structures resulting in a large budget yet comparatively tight space for manoeuvre. The Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU), by contrast, has a more modest budget and is situated within a smaller and more densely clustered set of organizational relationships.

In what follows we develop this comparative context as it pertains to communities in London and Glasgow, focusing attention on both the occurrence of violence involving young people, and efforts at violence

# London Violence Reduction Unit
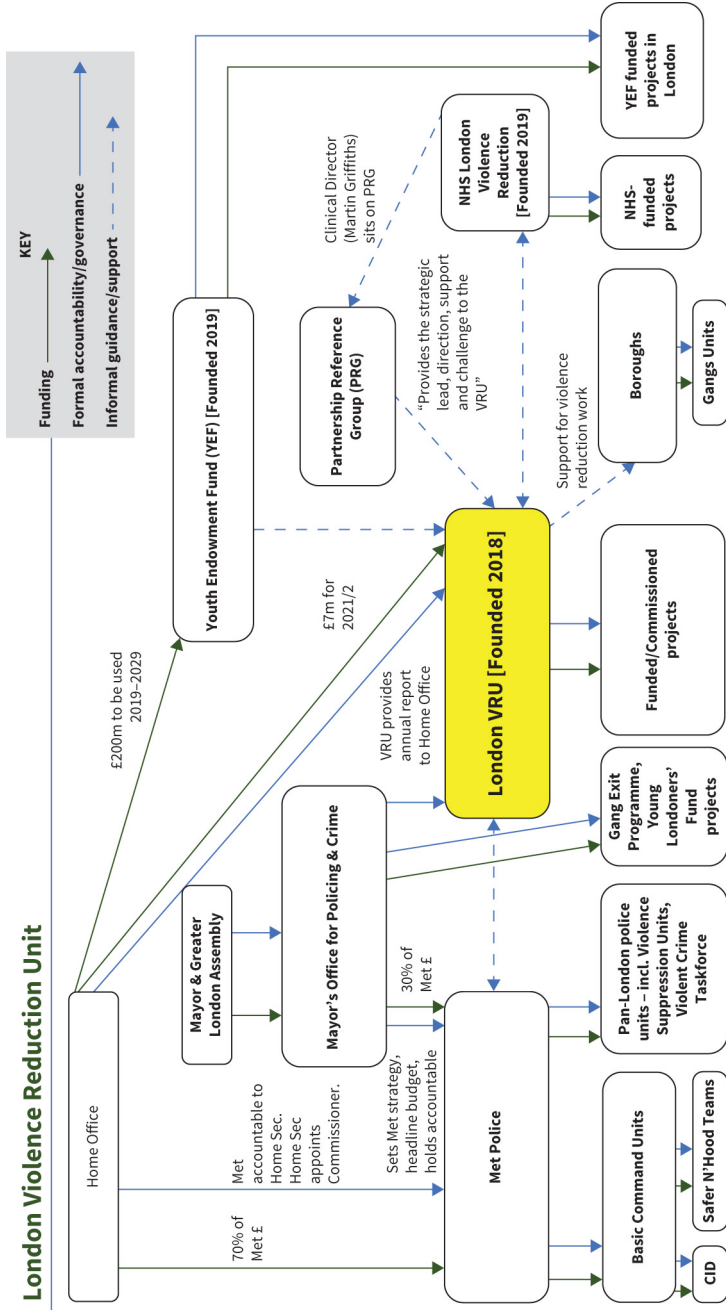


**Figure 2.1** Organizational interdependencies of the London Violence Reduction Unit
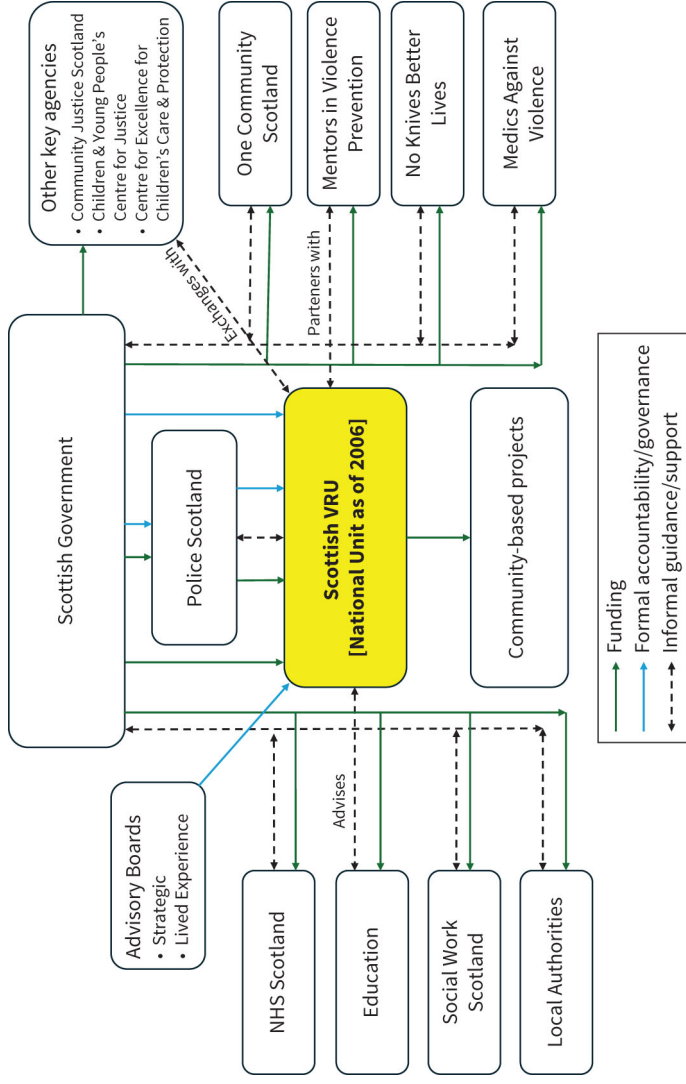
**Figure 2.2** Organizational interdependencies of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit

Other key agencies
• Community Justice Scotland
• Children & Young People's Centre for Justice
• Centre for Excellence for Children's Care & Protection

One Community Scotland

Mentors in Violence Prevention

No Knives Better Lives

Medics Against Violence

Scottish Government

Police Scotland

Scottish VRU [National Unit as of 2006]

Community-based projects

Advisory Boards
• Strategic
• Lived Experience

NHS Scotland

Education

Social Work Scotland

Local Authorities

Exchanges with

Parteners with

Advises

Funding

Formal accountability/governance

Informal guidance/support

reduction, in an effort to map the terrain of policy movement at the local level. The intention here is not only to apprehend the importance of locale in the movement of policy, but to underscore the gap between policy 'talk' (Pollitt, 2001) in the realm of violence reduction, and the complex realities with which such policies seek to intervene.

## London

In London, the study focused on the north-east boroughs of Hackney and Waltham Forest. Hackney has been described as one of the most diverse places in the world (Wessendorf, 2014), with over a third of Hackney residents born outside of the borough as of 2020 (Hackney Council, 2020). A significantly higher proportion of its population is non-white than for England as a whole, and it has a slightly lower proportion of white people than London. Black people are the largest ethnic minority group in Hackney, accounting for approximately 21% of the population. As of the 2011 census, eighty nine different languages were spoken in the borough (Hackney Council, 2020). Waltham Forest is also a diverse borough. Waltham Forest's overall ethnic mix closely mirrors London's as a whole: around 50% from white backgrounds, 20% Asian, 15% Black, 5% mixed and 5% 'other' (Waltham Forest Council, 2021). Both Hackney and Waltham Forest house a variety of community organizations dedicated to supporting young people, including those who are at risk of involvement in violence. Hackney has retained substantially more council-run provision since austerity cuts began in 2010 (Berry, 2021), as well as playing host to a range of independent youth charities, such as The Crib in the De Beauvoir area, Skyway in the Hoxton neighbourhood, and Hackney Quest in Homerton. Waltham Forest underwent significant cuts to council-run provision between 2010 and 2019 (Berry, 2021) but has a strong history of community-based youth support, through organizations such as Project Zero and Spark2Life, and more neighbourhood-based centres such as Aldriche Way and Priory Court.

In recent decades, particularly since the 2012 Olympics, property prices in both Hackney and Waltham Forest have increased, many of their housing estates have undergone regeneration, and high streets have noticeably shifted towards more expensive cafes and shops. Both areas contain neighbourhoods where there remain significant social and economic challenges, including high levels of poverty, unemployment, and health inequalities,

though often positioned 'chic by jowl' (Young, 1999) with areas of relative affluence. Prosperity and poverty have continued to coexist in the boroughs into the twenty first century, with neighbouring areas of both wealth and destitution. While the average house price in Hackney rose from £100,000 to £600,000 between 2000 and 2020, child poverty in the borough has remained between 40% and 50% throughout the past decade—standing at 43% (as of 2022—Trust for London, 2024a). Waltham Forest has shown a similar, if less extreme, trend: average house prices rose 85% between 2013 and 2018, stabilizing around £450,000, whilst 38% of its children live in poverty (as of 2022—Trust for London, 2024b). A recent mixed-methods study reviewing prosperity in five east London boroughs—including Hackney and Waltham Forest—concluded that livelihood insecurity is 'entrenched' across the area, despite promises that were made about regenerating the whole region post-Olympics (Woodcraft et al., 2024).

Media representations of violence in the study areas—and London more broadly—often alludes to its racialized character (Gunter, 2017: 225). In Waltham Forest, for instance, reports have often sensationalized the activities of the so-called 'Mali Boys'—a group of Somali heritage alleged to be 'one of the UK's deadliest gangs' (Phillips, 2023), encouraging what Hallsworth and Brotherton (2011: 8) describe as 'a highly racial discourse that panders to fears of the black criminal other'. As Rosbrook-Thompson et al., (2024: 4) argue, the actuarial approach to serious youth violence, as evidenced in databases such as the 'Gangs Matrix' reinforces 'a tendency to devote disproportionate attention to racialized minorities' while erasing their racialized dimensions. Whilst academic researchers have debated the extent to which young black men are disproportionately involved in violence in London (see e.g. Pitts, 2020), it is important to recognize the socio-historical conjuncture occupied by different migrant communities in London, and the complexities of individuals' 'situated agency' (Brotherton, 2015: 163) and 'multiple marginality' (Vigil, 2003). The racialized nature of stop-and-search, combined with the historical mistrust between minoritized communities and the police, contribute an important element to the local context of public health approaches in London.

## Glasgow

The east end of Glasgow, where community data collection was conducted, is also notable for its multiculturalism and its economic challenges. The

East End is the most ethnically diverse area of Glasgow, and the city as a whole has the highest percentage of Black and global majority people of all Scottish cities (Glasgow City Council, 2024). It is also an area which has faced profound economic hardship for over a century (Paton et al., 2017). Mooney's discourse analysis of media reports of the east end found, for example, '[o]verwhelmingly, the portrayal of this area and the people who live in it … was highly negative, drawing upon stereotypical representations of poverty in disadvantaged urban localities' (Mooney, 2012: 437–438). There have been a number of attempts to regenerate Glasgow East, with notable investment being pumped into the area repeatedly since the 1970s. Organizations such as the Glasgow Eastern Area Regeneration (GEAR) Project in the 1970s (Mooney et al., 2015) had much the same aims and objectives as 2007's Glasgow East Regeneration Agency (GERA) (Paton, 2018) but with very little difference in outcomes. Spatial immobility has found to limit young people's access to employment or training, opportunities, support and leisure (Batchelor et al, 2017).

As with the London Olympics of 2012, the Glasgow Commonwealth Games of 2014 came with promises of positive change for the East End. Initial optimism about this among Glasgow residents quickly dissipated, however, as residents realized that the legacy of the games was not what had been promised (Paton et al., 2017). Instead, clubs and centres for young people were closed, and many local conveniences shut up and moved on after population movement made business unfeasible. As in London, the East End is bolstered by community organizations seeking to improve outcomes for residents at a local level, strengthened by an array of additional youth and children's support organisations, such as FARE Scotland and PEEK Project, who offer city-wide youth provision. While these organizations are well used, there are still a large number of young people who do not access these services. Both cities share a reputation for youth street 'gang' activity, driven by territorialism and norms of violent masculinity, though the nature of that violence differs. Violence in Glasgow has often been perceived as 'recreational' in nature, however, fuelled by alcohol or drugs (Walsh et al., 2010), or long-standing neighbourhood rivalries (Fraser, 2015) whilst London is a primary node of globally-connected 'organized' crime—both of the street-based, visible kind, and of the more clandestine, 'white collar', financial kind (Edwards and Prins, 2014; Hobbs, 2013).

Although Scotland has experienced several waves of immigration—predominantly different groups of Irish, Jewish, Italian, Chinese, East European and Indian subcontinent immigrants (Croall and Frondigoun,

2010)—the country remains an overwhelmingly ethnically homogenous nation, with approximately 4% of the population categorized as belonging to black and minority ethnic (BAME) communities; though this increases to 19% in Glasgow.[2] To date, statistics indicate a relatively proportionate representation of minority ethnic groups in the Scottish criminal justice system, and that 'race' and ethnicity play a less significant role in victimization in Scotland than in other jurisdictions (Croall and Frondigoun, 2010). Recent increases in the number of racist incidents in Scotland and self-reported experiences of discrimination among BAME communities (Meer, 2018), however, have prompted scholars to draw attention to the comparative absence of discussions of racism in Scotland (Davidson et al., 2018). As Davidson and Virdee argue, 'this silence has come to be interpreted as an indication of its absence by much of the Scottish elite, including its political parties, helping to consolidate a now powerful myth that there is "no problem here"' (Davidson and Virdee, 2018: 8).

In summary, accounting for policy movement—be it in the sphere of criminal justice, or at the level of the street—necessitates not only an account of speed of policy alteration, but also of scale. As has been outlined, understanding the evolution of the public health approach to violence reduction in Scotland and England necessitates a dynamic understanding of the relationship between transnational policy flow, comparative national politics, and the local contexts in which principle meets policy implementation. However, as political geographers have demonstrated, the space of political power is one of contestation, in which differently-positioned groups struggle to reorient policies at differing scales (Jonas, 2015). In the following section, we consider two examples to illustrate the interleaving of these differing scales in Scotland and England. In so doing, our intention is to smooth the analytical path for subsequent interpretations of the divergent emergence of public health approaches in these same jurisdictions.

## Rescaling violence reduction

As has been argued, an understanding of the initial entry and subsequent evolution of the public health approach to violence reduction in Scotland

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[2] Understanding Glasgow (2022) Ethnicity—Scottish Cities. Available at: https://www.understandingglasgow.com/glasgow-indicators/population/ethnicity/scottish-cities [Accessed 20 June 2025].

and England requires an appreciation of the interaction of multiple scales of analysis, ranging from the transnational to the local. In order to render this argument more concrete, in this section we apply the approach to two instances of policy movement in violence reduction that are germane to our subsequent empirical analyses: focused deterrence and school exclusions. Though both, on the face of it, appear to be straightforward instances of transnational or national policy transfer (Jones and Newburn, 2021), in both scenarios the local scale operated as a critical shaping force, with tensions emerging between these differing scales.

## Focused deterrence

Flowing from an earlier project termed *Operation Ceasefire* (Dalton, 2002)[3] and Cincinnati's *Initiative to Reduce Violence* (CIRV), focused deterrence represents a targeted preventive effort to street based violence involving gang-involved youth, requiring coordination and cooperation among the core agencies involved. It involves communication with the targeted audience—in this case gang-affiliated youth—through 'offender notification meetings', 'call-ins' or 'forums', in which warnings about law enforcement responses are delivered (Engel et al., 2013). This, combined with assistance for those who want to change their lifestyles, together with various forms of community engagement, constitute the core of the approach. It is an approach that it is claimed has become 'mainstream' in the past two decades (Kennedy, 2019) though critics have suggested that sustaining positive results has proven difficult (Braga et al., 2019; Aspholm, 2020), and that the logics underpinning such approaches erase vital economic and cultural drivers for interpersonal violence (Brotherton, 2023). Nonetheless, and following a similar pattern to ZTP, the CIRV model became increasingly influential, in part due to the role of transnational 'transfer agents' from New York (Stone, 2004).

    Following a period of policy 'tourism', in which senior leaders in Scotland's public service visited the US initiative, and subsequent visits of David Kennedy, the architect of focused deterrence, the SVRU developed

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[3]  Initial evaluation identified some modest effects, but also raised numerous questions, not least about the sustainability of positive impact (McGarrell et al., 2010). Nonetheless, the apparent successes of the *Ceasefire* initiatives gave rise to a subsequent roll-out called *Project Safe Neighbourhoods,* involving $1.5bn of federal funding.

an adaptation of focused deterrence targeting territorial gang violence (Graham and Robertson, 2022). Based on the Cincinnati model, the SVRU ran its first 'call-in' in October 2008—a meeting involving eighty five gang-affiliated youth aged between sixteen and twenty two together with local community members. Opened by a sheriff, the session involved hard-hitting contributions from a senior police officer, a surgeon, a parent, a mentor who had been a gang member, and volunteers who ran a youth football scheme. Each of the young people present were given a card on arrival which had a free phone number which offered a 24/7 mentoring service. As with the Cincinnati programme, they were offered a choice: continue with violence and expect a robust criminal justice response or opt to leave violence behind and expect help and support to do so. Those who voluntarily attended these sessions were offered a range of support services and opportunities provided by public and third sector organizations aimed at preventing participants' involvement in gang violence (Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, 2011). At the same time, participants were warned of the serious consequences of not desisting from weapon carrying and violence (Donnelly and Tombs, 2008). It was the first of ten 'self-referral sessions' run over the next two years, attended by over 600 men and women overall.

Importantly, as the policy moved from transnational to national territories, it underwent a process of rescaling. Rather than the 'pulling levers' aspect of punitive policing central to the original model (Kennedy, 2019), the Scottish approach drew on the language of public health in a less literal way (Rosbrook-Thompson et al., 2024); prioritizing wraparound support, over time reframing the focal point from gangs to violence, in a way that tacked toward existing principles of welfarism. This meant considering the nature of the social context within which such violence occurred and how individual, relational, community, and social factors influenced violence. As the SVRU itself put it: 'Bringing all of this together called for a very different approach to violence than seeing it as just a police and law and order issue. This was an issue that concerned everyone and called for a response from individuals, communities and wider society, and a recognition that this was the only way that real change would come' (SVRU, undated).

Reflecting the differences in national and local dynamics described, when a similar attempt to institute focused deterrence was attempted in England and Wales, it proceeded along a different trajectory. In 2014, London Mayor Boris Johnson hosted an International Gang Summit at City Hall, to which he invited the Director of the SVRU along with other violence experts (Mayor of London, 2014). The following year Johnson announced

that MOPAC would establish a £200,000 pilot of a gang violence intervention, adhering to principles of New Public Management, which came to be known as 'Shield' (Mayor of London, 2015). Once again the policy was rescaled, this time to the local level. The pilot ran across the three London boroughs of Haringey, Lambeth and Westminster, and sought to apply the principles of the 'call-in' and multi-agency response, but with greater emphasis on the punitive notion of 'one rule for all'—the idea that if one individual was found to have committed a violent offence, the whole group would be held accountable. As a result, Shield was fiercely opposed by numerous community groups, concerned about its potential unfairness and racially disproportionate impact (see Institute for Race Relations, 2015). An evaluation of the Shield pilot reported that it had 'failed to demonstrate a significant reduction in violence' and was beset by a raft of 'challenges in implementation [that] resulted in no clear test [of the model]' (Davies et al., 2016: 5).

This example is intended, briefly, to sketch the significance of different scales of analysis in the movement of violence reduction policy. In the case of focused deterrence, an initial policy from the United States found its way to both Scotland and England, with notable differences of application and reception. In both cases, focused deterrence was seen by leaders—the SVRU in Scotland, London Mayor in England—as a solution to a particular problem, with the assistance of 'transfer agents' at the point of origin. In both cases, however, the policy was adapted and rescaled according to local conditions and, in the case of London, involving the contestation of local community organizations. In Scotland, the approach found political and public support and was viewed as a success. In London, the approach was met with strong resistance and became seen as a failed policy. In our second example, school exclusions, comparable patterns can be detected.

## School exclusions

Like focused deterrence, the policy of reducing school exclusion to prevent violence has recently moved from Glasgow to London. As an article on the Mayor of London's website (Mayor of London, n.d.) states, 'Bring down school exclusions, bring down violence'. The headline is accompanied by an image of Lib Peck, Director of the London Violence Reduction Unit (LVRU), alongside Maureen McKenna, Glasgow City Council's former Director of Education. During McKenna's tenure between 2007 and 2022,

Glasgow saw a considerable reduction in its school exclusions, coterminous with its reduction in street based violence (Billingham and Gillon, 2024). This was the result of a dedicated series of policies designed to prevent permanent exclusions from school, with the onus placed on teaching staff to demonstrate what they had done to prevent exclusions rather than on the pupil's behaviour. In 2023, McKenna was appointed as an advisor for the LVRU, supporting their pledge to reduce school exclusions in London—the LVRU having explicitly stated their intention to follow Glasgow's example. The call to replicate Glasgow's exclusion reduction has been echoed by a number of other important London agencies. In 2020, a London newspaper partnered with the London Community Foundation to launch a £1 million campaign to reduce exclusions in the capital, explicitly inspired by Glasgow's example (London Community Foundation, 2020). Lewisham and Southwark councils have each produced reports in the last few years (London Borough of Lewisham, 2018; London Borough of Southwark, 2020) highlighting Glasgow as an instructive case study of exclusion reduction—the latter directly stressing 'the relevance of lessons from Glasgow' (London Borough of Southwark, 2020: 20).

As in the example of focused deterrence, the cross-national movement of this policy idea altered as it passes through the differing sociopolitical geographies of Glasgow and London. At a national level, as McCluskey et al. (2019) argue, policy documents governing English practice are 'much more punitive in tone' than their Scottish equivalents, containing 'no discussion of the value or effectiveness of alternatives to exclusion' (McCluskey et al., 2019: 10). As Tawell and McCluskey (2022: 5) put it, English documents tended to frame exclusion as a 'legitimate sanction', whereas Scottish guidance frames it as 'an undesirable outcome'. This is substantiated by the wording of the most recent guidance for England (HM Government, 2022), which states that exclusion is 'sometimes a necessary part of a functioning system'. Respondents quoted by Cole et al. (2019: 385) suggest that, ever since the forming of the Coalition Government in 2010, England's education policies appeared to condone rather than condemn 'exclusionary practices'.

Added to this, at the local level, there are significant differences at play. London has 2,712 state-funded schools, including 502 secondaries (and more than 130 private schools), whilst Glasgow has 170 state-funded schools, including thirty secondaries (and fourteen private schools). Perhaps more importantly, though, there is the matter of governance. All of Glasgow's state-funded schools are run by its one local authority. In

London, by contrast, state-funded schools are run by an array of different agencies—over 70% of the secondary schools are academies, for instance, meaning that they are not run by local authorities. Some of these academies are part of large multi-academy trusts (MATs), which in some cases span multiple cities, whilst others are run by single academy trusts, unconnected in their governance from any other institution. Within most of London's thirty two boroughs, then, there is a mixture of schools that are run by the local authority, schools that are church-affiliated, schools that are part of MATs, and single academy trust schools. The London Violence Reduction Unit, which sits within the Mayor of London's office, has no formal powers over education.

In addition to these issues of governance and institutional arrangements, the policy environment of education in London—and the policy debate around school exclusion in the city more specifically—is marked by local issues of political scale which appear less prominent in Glasgow. For example, during the attempts to develop reductions in school exclusion, tensions between London's Labour Mayor and the UK's Conservative Government were palpable. When the LVRU announced its engagement of Maureen McKenna to support its exclusion reduction agenda, for example, a prominent government advisor writing in *The Spectator* positioned the move as the Mayor Sadiq Khan's personal decision, and suggested that it would be disastrous for London's schools (Bennett, 2023). One critical difference, reflecting some of the primary local drivers of exclusion and criminalization discussed above, lay in the dynamics of racism and racialization, with the debate about school exclusion in London deeply entwined with discussions about institutional racism. Notably, the connections between racialization and exclusion are a far more prominent feature of debates about this highly contested issue than they have been in Glasgow. As Billingham and Gillon (2024: 301) note, 'school exclusions in England disproportionately affect students from particular ethnic heritages—those from Black Caribbean, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds in particular'.

These two brief examples—of focused deterrence and school exclusion—give a sense of the complexity of policy movement, even between two comparable jurisdictions, and the significance of scale when seeking to 'follow the policy' (Peck and Theodore, 2012). Though the same rhetoric was used in both jurisdictions, the practice was markedly different, due in large part to divergences in the sociopolitical geographies through which policies were refracted. As Jones and Newburn attest, when policies move they are subject to 'modification, mutation and reconfiguration' (Jones and

Newburn, 2021: 13). These instances offer an important key into the larger cluster of policies investigated in this book, namely the public health approach to violence reduction. Though the public health approach gives the appearance of cross-national flow, the policy altered and mutated according to national politics and urban dynamics. By paying careful attention to this evolution, however, we may reveal not only the conditions for policy change, but a deeper comparative imagination of the countries themselves.

## Conclusion

A defining feature of the twenty first century is the emergence of new landscapes of crime, harm and security that challenge existing theoretical and methodological paradigms (Berg and Shearing, 2021). Societal interconnectedness, the growth of mobile technologies, and increasingly transnational fields of governance have brought about a new set of telescoping frontiers for criminological research. Responding to these issues as they present in the area of violence reduction policy, this chapter has sought to outline a scalar approach to the study of policy movement (Jonas, 2015). Drawing on examples from ZTP to school exclusion, we have sought to ground notions of cross-national policy flow in concrete examples, exploring the commonalities and differences that emerge. Understanding the dynamics of violence and violence reduction in Scotland and England requires a conceptual vocabulary that is able to interrogate the points of scalar friction between global flows, national institutions and community contexts.

  While violence prevention policies are mobile through a connected world-system (Marcuse, 1995), offering 'fast' solutions to given problems (Peck and Theodore, 2015), policy-making takes place in a political environment where competing ideas and actors are nested deep in the bowels of state bureaucracies, which generally tend toward slowness over speed, and where policy innovations are often stimulated by, and attached to, passing crises or controversies. As Rock has observed in a UK context, policy change tends to 'rise slowly, inconspicuously and methodically through "the system"' (Rock, 1995: 2). At the same time, policies must also be understood within the context of specific locales, as ideas flow round existing contours of urban and political geography. Added to this, street-based violence involving young people is driven by a wide range of background and foreground factors—from structural dislocation to emotional

humiliation—which the world of policy-making is quite distant from. To understand the dynamics of violence and violence reduction, then, we need to be able to analyse changes not only at the political and policy level but also at the level of the street.

In the following chapter, we spend time building a conceptual frame that allows for an analytical understanding of continuity and change within the 'policy' and 'street' environments in which, respectively, violence reduction policy is imagined and applied. This framework, drawing on the conceptual vocabulary of Pierre Bourdieu, is intended to introduce a complementary theoretical viewpoint to the notion of scale outlined in this chapter. While a scalar approach to policy movement is critical in exposing the tensions that operate at different spatial levels, the concept of 'field' helps to understand their temporal ordering and—importantly—the potential for agent-led change. In the subsequent chapters we apply this model to both Scotland and England to account for continuity, change and the way ahead.

# 3
# Theorizing Change

From Policy to Street

## Introduction

In recent decades, themes of temporality and change have increasingly entered the criminological lexicon. Against abiding critiques of the discipline's 'chronocentrism' (Rock, 2005)—'the belief that one's own times are paramount, that other periods pale in comparison' (Fowles, 1974: 249; Rock, 2005)—criminologists have turned to historical theory and methodologies in order to account for long-run trends in penal policy and crime statistics. Ranging from studies of the *longe durée* of change in penal policy (Loader and Sparks, 2004) to the dynamics of violence trends over the course of centuries (Mares, 2009; Ellis, 2019), scholarship has drawn attention to long-term patterning of crime and its control in ways that seek to reappraise the contingency of the present.[1] Beyond accounts of policy change discussed in chapter 2, however, analysis of the sources of change—or indeed of social transformation—has been more muted. Grappling with social change such as that offered by the promise of violence reduction requires us both to engage not only with a sense of scalar interaction between local, national and transnational forces but with an appreciation of how and why, under specific historical conditions, movements for change gather pace. What, for want of a better metaphor, is 'the spark' or the 'catalyst'?

As scholars have argued, rather than sudden rupture or paradigmatic change, historical change in crime and justice often involves enduring and stable features of the social systems that alter incrementally and in unplanned ways (Churchill, 2019). For Sewell, however, although 'small

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[1]  See, e.g. https://medievalmurdermap.co.uk [accessed 10 June 2025].

revisions may eventually result in significant transformations' (Sewell, 1996: 843), there are moments of 'accelerated change' in which social structures are 'initiated and carried forward by historical events' (Sewell, 1996: 843). Revolutions, wars, economic crises, pandemics—these are far-reaching social upheavals that have the potential to reorient the social and cultural foundations of a society, shifting perceptions of crime and its control in amplified or accelerated ways. In this context, it is important to understand the role of political contestation and struggle that may, under the right circumstances, mobilize and quicken social change. As such, as Loader and Sparks argue, we should be attentive to 'contestation and resistance', and to treat 'the conflict between cultural meanings and political ideas as central to understanding trajectories of change' (Loader and Sparks, 2004: 16).

In this chapter, we engage and extend these debates through engaging with the historical and sociological theory of Pierre Bourdieu. While Bourdieu's conceptual *oeuvre* has become increasingly prevalent in criminological theory, here we seek to break new ground by applying Bourdieu's concept of symbolic revolution (Bourdieu, 2017) as a means of apprehending the nature and extent of social change. To do this we firstly offer a general outline of Bourdieusian approaches to criminology, focusing on the concept of 'field', offering as it does an account of power and scale that is capable of apprehending the varying scales introduced in chapter 2 while introducing an account of social change. The concept, which compartmentalizes the social world into a sequence of social spaces that maintain their own unique logic (Bourdieu, 1984, 1993), enables an analytical contrast between the milieu of policy elites and street actors while retaining a sense of the homologies between these two 'overlapping' fields (Liu, 2021). Second, we invoke Bourdieu's theory of symbolic revolution within fields, drawing particular attention to the extant conditions required for social transformation. For Bourdieu, crisis conditions can call forward new prophets that have the capacity to shift the conditions of a given field. We add to this account the significance of stories and narrative in prompting social change (Fleetwood et al., 2019). Finally, we turn to Bourdieu's large-scale, collaborative endeavour *The Weight of the World* (1999), which gives voice to individuals struggling to build lives under the weight of structural and systemic oppression, as a touchstone for comprehending the depth and scale of the challenge of violence prevention in the contemporary era, before offering a conceptual account of how a comparable symbolic revolution might be envisaged.

## Field and violence reduction

Though Bourdieu wrote comparatively little on crime and justice (Shammas, 2018), his systematic analyses of social suffering (Bourdieu et al., 1999) and abiding concerns with domination offer a flexible sociological vocabulary that has been increasingly applied to interrogate experiences of crime, harm, and criminalization. Bourdieusian concepts have, for example, been brought to bear on studies of punishment (Wacquant, 2008), probation (Robinson et al., 2014), and illicit drug economies (Moyle and Coomber, 2017), pooling into what has been termed a putative 'Bourdieusian criminology' (Fraser and Sandberg, 2025 forthcoming).

To date, criminologists have focused primarily on Bourdieu's classical 'triplet' of field, habitus and capital. A field is a semi-autonomous social space that adheres to distinct logics, hierarchies and systems of social relations (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 16–17). Examples from his writing include the educational field, academic field, and field of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1984, 1993). As Threadgold has argued, fields are not hermetically sealed domains, but '[l]eaky containers of social action that germinate shared expectations, common sense norms, [and] classification systems' (Threadgold, 2020: 64). Habitus, in turn, has been likened to a 'sense of the game'—an instinctive response to learned rules comparable to a sporting environment (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 120–121). As recent scholarship has demonstrated, habitus is increasingly understood as existing not within a single field, but through multiple overlapping field-positions that Lahire has referred to as the 'plural actor' (2011). Finally, capital represents the 'tokens' required to play the game (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 99), primarily economic (money), social (networks) and cultural (symbolic resources such as education) which cohere to form an actor's position within any given field. Again, recent scholarship has elaborated the exchange-value of certain forms of capital, developed in one field, into another—for example the exchange of 'street' authenticity for credibility in the digital world (Alexander, 2023a).

In our analysis, it is this sense of exchange and plurality that hold particular conceptual significance, both in analysing the movement which formed around violence reduction in Scotland, and the subsequent emergence of public health approaches in England. In what follows, we centre the concept of field as it is applies to two overlapping domains in the context of violence reduction: policy and the street. Careful analysis of the social, cultural and practical dimensions of these fields—and the space that

exists between (Eyal, 2013)—allows insight into the trajectories of policy ideas as they enter into existing bureaucratic structures, their subsequent capacity to influence decision-making, and, in turn, their relationship to changes within the context of street culture. The mapping of these fields, in turn, opens space for subsequent discussions of the mechanisms underlying change within these contexts.

## The policy field

One line of established criminological work, drawing on Bourdieu, emphasizes the embodied imprint of state power on those working in the criminal justice system. Criminological scholarship on the concept of field has been applied, for example, as a means of broaching the relationship between individual decision-making and institutional cultures in the contexts of sentencing (McNeill et al., 2009), policing (Chan, 1996) and parole (Shammas, 2018). These studies have highlighted, importantly, the role of organizational cultures in the reproduction of injustice, with efforts to change policy often reverting to the natural 'order of things' (Wacquant, 1999). Rather than suggesting an unbending and inflexible set of systems, however Churchill (2019) argues that Bourdieu's concept of field allows for an understanding of criminal justice policy-making not as a totalizing entity, but rather as 'a social space constituted of diverse relations between multiple actors' (Churchill, 2019: 484). As he argues:

> Conceptualising crime control as a field of governance means regarding it as a semi-autonomous social space, composed of relations between multiple *agents* consciously engaged in the governance of crime. These *agents* assume *positions* within the field based on their differential capacity to govern. *Agents*' governmental capacity varies by several factors, including: access to resources; ability to deploy techniques; rationalities informing action; and the visibility of crimes and criminals to them. (Churchill, 2019: 484 (italics in original))

In contrast to what he terms a 'stadial' view of history—marked by totalizing shifts from 'punitive' to 'welfare' systems of crime policies—Churchill (2019) argues for a view of crime policy as dynamic social fields in the constant process of contest and evolution. As opposed to epochal change, this approach takes note of both enduring and mutable features of the social

systems under consideration. Such an account moves beyond a view of policy as a closed and self-reproducing system, toward an analysis premised on an active set of power-relations that have the capacity to shift and realign, allowing space for agentic action within a given policy context. An account of the policy field as a relational space, therefore, requires an appreciation of the *mens rea* of policy actors, asking, 'how the actors whose relations constitute the field of crime control—politicians, civil servants, practitioners, campaigners, journalists, think-tanks, criminologists (cf Wacquant, 1999)—struggle to "name" the problem and mobilise behind particular preferred "solutions", and tracing in close detail the trajectories of particular policy contests' (Loader and Sparks, 2004: 19). In turn, this conceptualization helps us to understand the differing logics in the decision-making of Holyrood and Westminster.

The concept of a 'policy field' is consistent with existing scholarship indicating the variegated terrain of actors within the penal field—from those with consecrated forms of capital such ministers, government advisors and senior civil servants to think tanks, civil society groups, campaigners—but also the contingencies that exist between policy decisions (Pollitt, 2001) and their practical application. In the context of the 'police field', for example, Chan contrasts the embedded, 'interpretive and active' knowledge (1996: 115) through which police decision-making operates with the changing bureaucratic imperatives at the level of police governance. These forms of habituated action are difficult to alter but can be subject to change under certain circumstances, although 'the resulting practice may or may not be substantially or even discernibly changed' (Chan, 1996: 131). Similarly, Robinson et al. have drawn attention to the conflicts that emerge between punitive policies and professional cultures within the probation service in England and Wales, with the 'probation habitus' representing a tension between social work values and punitive systems (Robinson et al., 2014). The 'policy field', therefore, is a relational social space composed of competing actors engaged in conflict over the correct definition of a problem.

As discussed in chapter 2, crime policy has become an increasingly transnational policy field (Go and Krause, 2016) where policy ideas move through 'epistemic communities' (Haas, 1992) that span business, politics and media. In this sense, it is instructive to conceive of the space of criminal justice policy as a transnational field invested with an elite habitus and associated forms of capital (Go and Krause, 2016), but with scalar 'territorial policy fields' nested within (Liu, 2021). As Barker notes, it is important to recognize the significance of place, and subnational variations,

in assessing the drivers of change, 'broad social transformation is made up and made meaningful by particular experiences of change, experiences that are grounded in specific places and localities' (Barker, 2009: 178). The policy imaginations within these given field contexts are structured by a 'governing habitus' that may be removed from the everyday policy impacts. As Brangan argues, 'political elites filter public feelings and policy demands through a governing habitus, a taken-for-granted political mentality, and this helps align policies with the dominant beliefs about the general objectives of government' (Brangan, 2023: 941). Such transnational networks of influence 'intermesh hierarchies and networks, serve as connectors and coordinate influence from multiple, moving perches, inside and outside official structures' (Wedel, 2017: 153; cited in Arrigoni, 2022: 1287). Such individuals seek, in Bourdieu's terms, to redefine the policy field to reframe the policy problem in a way that accords with their preferred solution (Sapiro, 2018). As discussed in chapter 2, for example, the 'Cure Violence' initiative has sought to export a model of intervention from the United States to jurisdictions such as South Africa, Colombia and Trinidad and Tobago (Riemann, 2019).[2]

For a number of scholars, the variability and discretion inherent within the policy field creates important space for an analysis of social transformation (Barker, 2009). As Garland notes of policy-making in the penal field, it 'is composed not of fully settled practices and firmly established policies but rather of competing actors and ongoing struggles, often with delicately balanced forces and power ratios whose equilibria are subject to change' (Garland, 2004: 167–168; quoted in Goodman, Page and Phelps, 2017: 6–7). In *Breaking the Pendulum*, for example, Goodman, Page and Phelps (2017) draw from the concept of field to compose an account of contestation and struggle in the politics of penal policy. The authors are critical of the so-called 'pendular' accounts of penal change—which stress a rhythmic back-and-forth between punitivism and welfarism—as mechanistic, totalizing, and binarized. In these accounts, the authors argue, there is insufficient space for well-documented examples of contestation. Instead they call for a mid-level account of how and why change takes place (Garland, 2013). This 'agonistic' perspective is premised on the notion that 'struggle is the motor of penal change' and that, 'actors (or "agonists") with varying resources and differing visions of how to prevent and sanction crime continually

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contest punishment' (Goodman, Page and Phelps, 2017: 3). Importantly, and building on the analysis set out in chapter 2, such contestations tend to have unique cultures operating at different scales (Goodman, Page and Phelps 2017). In sum, the authors argue that 'struggle':

> can be thought of as nested, with social-structural conditions filtering first through fields (e.g., penal, political, bureaucratic, and juridical) and then through organizations (e.g., departments of corrections, state legislatures, and court systems). This axiom forces us to analyze contestation on the ground, and within the context of large-scale social processes that shrink or expand opportunities for transformation and affect the shape of struggle. (Goodman, Page and Phelps 2017: 13)

In the chapters that follow, we build on these insights to envisage, following Petzke (2022), a 'space between fields' (Eyal, 2013) that rescales policy-making in such a way as to act as a motor for change. In so doing, however, we must also acknowledge the conceptual and practical significance of the 'street field', an arena where decision-making in the 'policy field' purports to alter, yet which accords to its own logic. From this perspective, the field of social relations in street culture is formed in opposition to state power, and results in forms of capital and disposition that are distinct from those found in other fields. If an authentic experience of violence reduction is to be imagined, it must properly take account of the levers of social transformation that exist within this cluster of power-relations (Shammas and Sandberg, 2016).

## The street field

'The street' has long occupied a central space in the criminological imagination. Classic studies of street culture, for instance, revolve around notions of respect and reputation. Anderson, in his work *Code of the Street* (1999) identifies a set of 'street' dispositions in low-income communities in Philadelphia. For Anderson, the code is a 'partly specified but partly emergent' (Anderson, 1999: 99) matrix of informal rules and social cues that that has emerged in opposition to structural exclusion and racism (Bourgois, 1995). These bodily dispositions entail a 'careful way of moving, of acting, of getting up and down the streets' in which 'the toughest, the biggest, and

the baddest individual prevails' (Anderson, 1999: 23–25). Researchers in a range of geographical contexts have identified similar forms of street based dispositions in communities of 'advanced marginality' (Wacquant, 2008). Indeed, Jock Young (1999: 12) has argued that this form of masculine street culture represents a defensive response to inequality that is near-universal:

> Young men facing such a denial of recognition turn, everywhere in the world, in what must be almost a universal criminological law, to the creation of cultures of machismo, to the mobilisation of one of their only resources, physical strength, to the formation of gangs and to the defence of their own "turf". Being denied the respect of others they create a subculture that revolves around masculine powers and "respect".

For Bourdieu, the operation of habitus, field and capital represents a set of experiential, improvised dispositions that embody the internalization of external social structures. The social world is replete with inequality, exploitation and domination, which exists both on a tangible 'objective' level and an internalized 'subjective' level (Bourdieu, 1990). Bourdieu calls this process 'symbolic violence', referring to non-physical forms of violence that are exerted through unequal social structures (Bourdieu, 2000). The operation of symbolic violence is an intangible process, like an invisible force field. In this sense the 'street field', created by forces of structural oppression, operates in an agonistic pattern that mirrors, but inverts, the competitive logic of the bureaucratic field.

In recent years, scholars across a range of global contexts have drawn on these concepts to elaborate the dynamics of violent street cultures through the notion of 'street field' and 'street habitus'. The 'street field' is a physical and symbolic realm in which criminal actors enter into struggle for resources and distinction through the embodiment of a form of 'street' (Sandberg, 2008) or 'warrior' capital (Palmas, 2015). For Shammas and Sandberg (2016) the street field is constituted by three primary axes:

(1) the external *boundaries* that regulate access to the social milieu of the street;
(2) the *differentiated positions* that exist within the field, between the dominant and subordinate; and
(3) the *effects* of socialization within the field, in the form of the development of a street 'habitus'.

In the context of violent street culture, Sandberg argues, capital can be seen in the actor's mastery of criminalized activity and violence within the 'street' milieu with its attendant rewards, gains, profits, and sanctions (Sandberg, 2008). In the street field, the 'rules of the game' adhere to a logic of skilful off-the-books entrepreneurialism and the symbolic capital of a 'street' reputation. In this context, a 'street habitus' denotes an embodied, streetwise disposition in which bodily capital, language, and street smarts are employed to navigate violent social terrain. Thus, for Sandberg and Pederson, 'street habitus' can be 'conceptualised as the relatively permanent and sometimes unconscious dispositions of individuals committed to street culture. It is the embodied practical sense that is seen in hypersensitivity to offences and frequent displays of violent potential' (Sandberg and Pederson, 2011: 34; Ilan, 2013; Fraser, 2013, 2015). A 'street habitus', emerging as it does from the experience of symbolic violence, is thus shaped invisibly by socio-economic structures (Winlow and Hall, 2010; Akram, 2014), while at the same time being a cultural product in constant flux.

Through these elaborations of the concepts of 'street' field, capital and habitus, a flexible repertoire of concepts has developed which seeks to analyse the structured moral universe of the street. Crucially, like the policy field, the street field environment is *agonistic*, and hence subject to evolution and change through the actions of external forces or internal actors. Such changes in field environments have been analysed in a range of domains. Recently, for example, the emergence of digital technologies has challenged the equilibrium of the 'previously closed street field', with street based dispositions supplanted—but not entirely erased—by technological competencies (Bakken, Oksanen, and Demant, 2023: 3–7). Similarly, Dziewanski (2020) has recently introduced the concept of 'street virtuosos', namely individuals who, despite deep investment in street culture, are able to nonetheless act outside the norms of the field, in essence bending the field to their will and 'pushing the limits of what can be done in the milieu' (Dziewanski, 2020: 1380). Bakkali (2022) plots the routes out of the street field for young people into adjacent fields in which 'street' capital can be exchanged for economic gain, to form alternative careers beyond the street (see also Alexander, 2023a). As Bakkali (2022: 421) notes, 'the market-based fascination with street culture has also enabled the formation of specialist cultural producers' who navigate street authenticity and consumer success via rap music.

In our analysis, similarly, we seek to explore the potential for change and movement within the street field, like Eyal (2013) prising open the 'spaces

between fields' to explore the potential for 'plural actors' (Lahire, 2011) to occupy uniquely influential positions within both street and policy fields. We hypothesize that this was a critical element in the unfolding of discursive reconstruction in the space of violence reduction in Scotland, and to a lesser extent in England, and suggest that supporting and sustaining this form of plural actorship represents an important means of seeding change in both environments. To better elaborate the potential within this approach, we turn now to broader discussions of plural fields and split habitus.

## The space between fields

Recent contributions to Bourdieusian scholarship have focused not on 'fields' as closed social vacuums but rather as 'leaky containers' (Threadgold, 2020) that hold, but do not fully contain, 'joint ways of thinking, feeling, and acting' (Wacquant, 2014: 120). Drawing particularly on the 'affective turn' within the social sciences, Threadgold conceives of fields not just as 'structures, histories, norms, traditions', but as lively and atmospheric social spaces that shape emotional dispositions 'with their own affective atmospheres and structures of feeling' (Threadgold, 2020: 17). As such, Threadgold argues, fields are not abstract and separate but 'affective charges' we sparked during particular moments (Threadgold, 2020: 16), and that can elicit differing response in new field conditions. One particularly apposite line of inquiry has developed in the analysis not of individual fields, but rather the 'spaces between fields' (Eyal, 2013), the uncanny and uncertain hinterlands where the freighted power-relations between fields come into contact within 'thick boundary zones' (Arrigoni, 2022) that exist within and between different scales (Jonas, 2015). Arrigoni, for example, draws on the work of Eyal to conceive of the space between fields as overlapping and 'interstitial': 'a space that is underdetermined, where things can be done and combinations and conversions can be established that are not possible to do within fields. In short, it is a space that has been opened up by some abrupt change and that can generate even more changes' (Eyal, 2013: 177). As such, for Arrigoni, organizations that are positioned *between* fields have a unique capacity to begin a kind of domino effect of social change. Boundary-spanning organizations such as think tanks exist within 'a distinct subspace of knowledge production at the crossroads between the academic, political, economic, and media fields' (Arrigoni, 2022 1287), and it is this 'unsettling ambiguity' that explains their enduring influence.

Individuals and organizations can challenge the norms of the field which they operate within, as well as straddling adjacent fields.

In Bourdieu's work, occupying space across multiple fields may result a 'split', or 'tormented' habitus that bridges between differing field experiences. Wacquant's 'anatomy and genealogy' of habitus, for example, discusses the schisms, tensions, and 'tugs' that can emerge from these conflicting dispositions (Wacquant, 2016). Similarly, Lahire argues that individual actors cannot be conceived as occupying single, unified fields—or, indeed, embodying a coherent habitus. Instead, he argues, social actors are constantly traversing multiple field environments, each of which may leave an imprint—or, as Threadgold argues, an 'affective charge' (Threadgold, 2020: 16). The 'plural actor', then, is an agent that is reflexively aware of the limits and boundaries within adjacent fields and skilfully manoeuvres between the two. In the criminological literature, this might be imagined as akin to 'code-switching' between street and school (Anderson, 1999), or the class conflict that emerges within professionalized youth justice settings (Arnež, 2023: 72). Most notably for the current analysis, Liu characterizes the movement of actors between fields as 'brokers' as 'hinges' who 'have the capacity of connecting two spaces' (Liu, 2021: 132). The examples Liu offers are of 'former government officials' who may traverse political and business environments, or '[a]thletes who become sports TV hosts after retirement are brokers between the two symbiotic spaces of popular media and spectator sports' (Liu, 2021: 132). In the space of violence reduction, such 'space travellers' may, like Bakkali's (2022) depiction of young people converting 'street capital' for authenticity in the music industry, involve formerly gang-involved youth moving into policy-making circles. Interestingly, Liu suggests that such 'brokers' may not always be powerful actors but liminal, 'subordinate or marginal actors' (Liu, 2021: 133) who occupy multiple margins.

Those occupying such positions between policy and street fields often resemble what Lipsky called 'street-level bureaucrats': 'lower-level' participants within large state agencies who 'often do not share the perspectives and preferences of their superiors' (Lipsky, 2010: 16). A schoolteacher tasked with imposing discipline for unruly conduct, for example, may opt to take a different decision given their knowledge of the pupil (Lipsky, 2010: 15). Similarly, a youth worker may reject the diktats of routinized evaluation for a funding body in response to the very urgent demands of a young person in their care. In this sense, it is important to note that, for street level bureaucrats such as these, decision-making is not only tethered

to the organizational culture within their respective field, nor to centralized policy-making, but also to the community and street based settings in which they are engaged. In this sense, they occupy a position between policy and street settings, which hew to differing logics. Such individuals, as Petzke (2022: 495) has argued, can come to occupy a unique space within sociopolitical arrangements due to their 'subjective predisposition towards dialectical syntheses':

> Theirs is a habitus which is itself the product and marriage of biographical tensions and contradictions, which makes it uniquely suited to bring and hold together the opposites of a field.... It is precisely the hybrid character of those marked by such a habitus,... that triggers a conciliation of opposites. (Petzke 2022: 495)

Important as such instances of 'split habitus' may be for the instantiation of 'symbolic revolutions'—as we will go on to elaborate—recent scholarship has also gestured toward the genesis of hybridized subject positions that mesh the dynamics of adjacent fields in new and innovative ways. Berger (2024), for example, has drawn on these emergent strands of Bourdieusian scholarship to interrogate the cultural and economic praxis of middle class drug dealers in Oslo, who traverse both 'street' and 'elite' social spaces, posing the question: 'what if people do not stand firmly in elite or street social space, but somewhere in between?' For Berger (2024: 4), these young dealers enact a mode of comportment that is rooted in neither social space but instead in a 'boundary zone' that produces 'hybrid social actors'. These individuals 'act as bridge builders between spaces, norms, values, and practices' (Berger, 2024: 2), and as such may be viewed as innovators. In the space of violence reduction, those who occupy a position between street and policy domains 'from below' are often voices drawn from lived experience of violence, or the justice system, who are able to articulate systemic inequality at both an individual and individual level. When formed into solidaristic movements with 'street level bureaucrats' operating at the intersection of policy and the street, there is potential for social transformation.

   As Petzke (2022) has recently argued, under certain conditions individuals with such a split habitus can play a vital role in the reconfiguration of a given field, in the form of a so-called 'symbolic revolution'. As Bourdieu notes, symbolic revolutions can be prompted 'when subaltern members within the dominated fraction of the dominant class—social workers, teachers, unpromoted academics... including artists ... may galvanise

others in their claims for social justice' (Bourdieu, 2017; cited in Fowler, 2020: 455). In the following section, we outline current lines of argument pertaining to the concept, before sketching the application we seek to develop in the analysis which follows.

## Symbolic revolutions

Contrary to scholars who present Bourdieu as a determinist (Jenkins, 2002), recent posthumous publications (Bourdieu, 2017) have considered the conditions that allow for agent-driven symbolic revolutions that lead to social transformation (Fowler, 2020). This amounts not only to a form of 'virtuosic performance' that allows an individual to 'bend' the field and act against its intrinsic logic (Dziewanski, 2020), but a capacity to alter systems of perception themselves, in the form of an avant garde movement (Grenfell and Hardy, 2003). As Bourdieu argues, 'those actors who possess extraordinary cultural capital in any particular field will also possess the potential to restructure that field and to revalue its values' (Bourdieu, 2017: 457). Such symbolic revolutions, for Bourdieu, involve a full-scale reconfiguration of the values that inhere in a given field environment, creating new cognitive structures in the process (Bourdieu, 2017: 3). Though the instance that Bourdieu highlights is that of Manet's incendiary impact on the artistic field, the capacity of a charismatic individual to shift structures of perception can also help account for the decisive role of individual agents in creating movements for change. As Bourdieu notes of this form of symbolic revolution: '[i]n the advanced forms of autonomous universes, the fields, it's the only form of revolution' (Bourdieu, 2017: 377–378). In setting out an understanding of the levers of social change that allow for violence reduction, the concept of symbolic revolution is of particular significance.

Fowler notes that moments of social transformation are often precipitated by a sense of impending crises such as 'scarcity, war, hyper-inflation, mass migration, or colonisation' (Fowler, 2020). Drawing on Bourdieu and Weber, Fowler draws attention to the agentic role of charismatic prophets and 'oral poets' during such moments. As she argues:

> The sentiment that things tend to persist in their being, that there are careers, probable futures …, this all totters in the periods of crisis. …. It's favourable terrain for prophetic intervention. From the moment … when one doesn't see too much what is going to happen, the

prophet intervenes. It's the poet in precapitalist societies. In societies like ours, a politician comes to the fore. (Bourdieu, 2016: 139; cited in Fowler, 2020: 454)

Following the sociology of Max Weber, and his distinction between 'traditional', 'rational-legal', and 'charismatic' models of political authority, during moments of political crises it is often 'charismatic' leaders that are called forth. Where in most instances contemporary political authority is derived from occupancy of a 'rational', legitimated office of state, during moments of 'political distress' (Weber, 1968: 245), leaders may emerge outside of bureaucratic structures who are endowed with 'specific gifts of the body and spirit'. It is these forces, Joosse argues, that propelled Donald Trump's ascendancy to the US Presidency (Joosse, 2018). These individuals draw strength not from 'rational' traditions but from the 'charismatic' authority of the prophet or demagogue (Weber, 1968: 313), and are invested by followers with 'extraordinary gifts' (Bendix, 1960: 295); 'a kind of tincture, a special element or quality' (Turner, 2003: 9). As Oomen notes, such leaders may emerge in times of trouble, separate from existing structures, as a result of a 'collective excitement' brought on by the political moment (Joosse, 2018), but there are instances when such leadership can emerge within 'permanent systems of authority' (Oomen, 1967: 91). Once a charismatic leader has become established, a form of freedom can emerge 'once followers attribute such extraordinary qualities to leaders, these leaders are accorded a certain "radical freedom" that is seldom found in non-charismatic modes of the social contract'—a 'virtuosic' quality to effect 'alchemical transformations of moral culture' (Joosse, 2018: 995). As such, for Weber 'charisma is the great revolutionary force' (1922: 245).

Analysis of temporal change, through the social and cultural domain of field, enables an understanding of history as contingent and 'fractal', involving competition and struggle between differently situated actors (Sewell, 1996). In crises situations, a position can open up in which a new charismatic leader can seek to rearticulate the conditions of the field. This moment, which has elsewhere been described as a 'window' (Kingdon, 1984), can afford a platform for a prophetic voice to carry into new fields. In short, the unfolding of crises within given fields—when 'the established order see-saws and the whole future is suspended' (Bourdieu, 1991: 34)—allows a space to open for new prophetic leaders to emerge. Such leaders, Bourdieu argues, may be heretics from within the system who are 'predisposed to reconcile the irreconcilable' (Petzke,

2022: 495) due to their split habitus, and may be 'ill at ease in both of the worlds within which they feel torn and which they subvert' (Bourdieu, 2017: 302; cited in Petzke, 2022: 495). Such symbolic revolutionaries, or 'subversive innovators', are formed not by individual genius but specific fields (Threadgold, 2020). The ability to unite disparate logics, to 'formulate and name' new systems of thought, is for Bourdieu the first stage in the ascension of new prophets, pre-existing oppositions in the given field are replaced with 'a new orthodoxy' which is then anointed through its grounding in existing canonical sources (Bourdieu, 1991). The result, for Petzke, is for the formation of:

> a new orthodoxy that coincides with the installation of a new "nomos," i.e., a new principle of vision and division that reorders the perceptions of legitimate practice and valuable assets in the field. Such revolutions may grant a new autonomy to the field so that one may speak of the revolution as akin to a founding act. However, they can also occur in well-established fields and simply install conceptually new distinctions that fundamentally restructure the ways in which authority and legitimacy is assigned. (Petzke, 2022: 491)

Reading across the varying instances of symbolic revolution in Bourdieu's oeuvre, Petzke identifies four central features:

1) the conciliation and overcoming of pre-existing discursive opposites;
2) the existence of a split habitus in the putative leadership;
3) a sense of impending crises as catalysts of symbolic revolutions; and
4) a return to, and remarshalling of, canonical sources within the field (Petzke, 2022: 490).

   In the example that forms the substantive focus of this book, we draw on these features to explore the movement and emergence of the public health approach to violence in Scotland and England during periods of perceived crisis. In both contexts, leaders emerged who sought to reframe debate around the reconciliation of opposites, who either exhibited a 'split habitus' or otherwise came to occupy a 'space between fields' (Eyal, 2013). Also, in both, there was an effort to marshal canonical sources, though with notable differences between jurisdictions. While in Scotland, these sources involved the retelling of national stories by charismatic leaders, in England the 'cold charisma' of numbers (Mau, 2019) represented the primary source

of legitimacy. In order to conceptualize these differences, we turn next to the relationship between field and narrative.

## Field, narrative, and storytelling

Recent years have seen a resurgence of interest in the significance of stories in 'instigating, sustaining, or effecting desistance from harmful action' (Presser and Sandberg, 2015: 1), mining the stories of crime that connect individual and societal narratives. Initially focusing on the way that narratives were deployed by offenders, be it in the form of justificatory 'gangster narratives' from wider society (Sandberg, 2009), the framing of past violence as a form of 'heroic struggle' (Presser, 2009), or articulations of 'redemption scripts' that smooth the path toward desistance (Maruna, 2001), narrative scholarship has burgeoned into an interdisciplinary enterprise incorporating literary theory, linguistics, and social psychology (Fleetwood et al., 2019). Notably, in this regard, recent interventions have sought to tether a narrative-oriented analysis of the social world with the Bourdieusian concepts of 'habitus' and 'field' (Fleetwood, 2016; Sandberg and Fleetwood, 2017). For narrative criminologists, habitus and field influence the forms of story that can be told, with 'narrative habitus' (Fleetwood, 2016) shaping the stories that are told in different social spaces. As Sandberg and Fleetwood (2017: 379) note, 'storytellers have creativity, but only within the limits of the field'. Put differently, social position influences the authority with which a story is told, and how it is received. Polletta (2006: 8) refers to this as 'storytelling authority', with different forms of capital able to 'both gain from norms of storytelling and be able to breach them with fewer ramifications' (Polletta, 2006: 25). Crucially, language also allows actors to bridge across plural fields (Sandberg and Fleetwood, 2017). Stories have the capacity to cross boundaries between fields, and those straddling fields can embody hybrid identities, personifying narratives derived from contrasting social environments.

Existing literature on narrative criminology has focused largely on the significance of storytelling for individuals engaged in the 'street field' (Sandberg and Fleetwood, 2017). For Sandberg and Fleetwood (2017), for example, stories of 'good business', physical toughness and 'acting loco' form part of a lexicographic repertoire of street actors, with verbal quickness and storytelling having the potential to defuse a violent situation or create solidarity. More recently, a number of important contributions

have demonstrated the role that stories can play in resisting forms of violence (Fleetwood, 2019; Sandberg and Colvin, 2020; Copes et al., 2023). As Sandberg and Colvin summarize, such counter-narratives are 'stories that challenge or oppose dominant stories either in mainstream social or in subcultural contexts' (Sandberg and Colvin, 2020: 1588). In seeking to interrogate the role that stories can play in challenging both systemic and street based forms of violence (Fleetwood, 2019; Sandberg and Colvin, 2020; Copes et al., 2023), narrative scholars are increasingly aiming not 'just to analyse narratives, but to try and change them' (Fleetwood et al., 2019: 16).

At the same time, a number of recent studies have started to pay much greater attention to the importance of narrative in the field of policy. For Roe (1994: 3), a policy narrative is 'those stories—scenarios and arguments— that are taken by one or more parties to the controversy as under-writing (that is, establishing or certifying) and stabilising (that is, fixing or making steady) the assumptions for policymaking in the face of the issue's uncertainty, complexity or polarization'. Developing these ideas in a criminological context, Annison draws on the work of Maarten Hajer (1997), and in particular, the notion of 'storylines', as one means of analysing penal policy change. Storylines, he suggests, 'act as a kind of "discursive cement" for "elite" policy makers, enabling them both to act in common purpose and to negotiate their way through the muddle and disorder of politics' (Annison, 2022: 388). For Hajer, a 'storyline' is a form of productive narrative and one that allows meaningfulness to be attributed to particular phenomena under consideration. Under certain conditions a 'communicative miracle' may occur in which a shared 'narrative enables a range of political actors, with their diverse perceptions and policy goals, to align and thereby for significant policy activity to flow from this' (Annison, 2022: 391). For Annison, stories help policy developments to 'make sense' by connecting policy ideas with broader contexts, providing meaning and framing what appears possible and sensible. In certain circumstances, they can be used to deflect contestation, either offering a convincing account or by placing ideas somehow beyond dispute (Annison, 2022). As we will argue, the symbolic revolution in the space of violence reduction in Scotland proceeded from the mobilization of a specific set of storytelling conventions that had reach in both policy and street fields.

At the same time, however, it is notable that the power of storytelling is limited by political reality. Bourdieu contrasts the diktats of what he terms the 'new mandarins', increasingly schooled in the economics of the financial sector—who 'claim to manage the public services like a private

enterprise' (Bourdieu et al., 1999: 183)—with those 'street level bureaucrats' tasked with delivering these services. In the context of the Westminster policy field, as we will argue, the logic of 'New Public Management' (Hood, 1991) placed limits on the movement of stories. Instead, as will be argued in chapter 7, policy-making decisions took place within the context of demands for marketization and efficiency. This contradiction between the economic and social functions of government—in Bourdieu's terms the right and left hand of the state—have amplified in the context of the neo-liberal era (Renaut, 2017: 110). In building a conceptual frame through which to apprehend the potential within the public health approach to violence reduction, it is to these realities that we finally turn.

## Structural violence and social suffering

As well as sharpening our analysis of policy contexts in which violence reduction takes place, Bourdieu's concepts can also enrich analyses of the object of that change: the violence and harm experienced at the community level. For Bourdieu, interpersonal physical violence occurring between individuals must be understood within a context of structural violence and social suffering. These societal circumstances, to use Currie's (2016: 89) term, form the 'social conditions which predictably breed violence'. In bringing together accounts of social transformation with those of contemporary reality, we hope to bring conceptual tools to bear on the present.

   Bourdieu equates the weight of structural violence to that of individual violence: 'structural violence exerted by the financial markets . . . is matched sooner or later in the form of suicides, crime and delinquency, drug addiction, alcoholism, a whole host of minor and major everyday acts of violence' (1998: 40). For young people in particular, he argued that the world is not a 'universe of possibles', but 'full of injunctions and prohibitions, signs of appropriation and exclusion, obligatory routes or impassable barriers' (Bourdieu, 1997: 225). As such, the economic capital to be gained through the street economy is complemented by a street based 'cultural capital' revolving round respect, status and identity. As a result, young people 'may also use acts of violence which in themselves count for more than, or as much as, the profits they procure . . . as a desperate way of existing . . . of making something happen rather than nothing' (Bourdieu, 1997: 223). Though not adopting an explicitly Bourdieusian lens, the work of Francois Cusset draws on a similarly relational understanding of

violence. For Cusset, the contemporary age of neoliberal economics is one of 'triple violence' which exerts violence 'upon', 'between', and 'within' communities: '[v]iolence on us, by the constraint of structures and the arbitrariness of powers. Violence between us, through the rivalry of principles/deeply held beliefs between economic subjects. And violence in us, through the still little known, and badly treated, psychic ravages of the invisible hell of work' (Cusset, 2018: 91). Similarly, interpersonal violence 'between' young people is entwined with the structural harms pressing down 'upon' them, and the psychosocial tensions 'within'.

Bourdieu framed accounts of violence, in later work, through the lens of neoliberal economics and its impact not only on young people but the public servants tasked with its control. Bourdieu's large-scale, collaborative endeavour *Weight of the World* (1999), for example, explores the tension and friction within the institutions of the neoliberal state at the turn of the millennium. The text, co-authored with a large and heteronomous network of international collaborators, gives voice to individuals struggling to build lives under the weight of structural and systemic oppression, coining the term 'social suffering' to describe these variegated forms of inequality and strife. One of the major contributions of the volume is the training of attention of neoliberal policy-making on what he terms the 'left hand' of the state: the 'minor civil servants' of police, teachers, and judges. For Bourdieu these individuals do not suffer *le grand misère* of poverty and destitution, but *le petit misère* of frustration, abandonment, and anomie. As he argues:

> It is understandable that minor civil servants, and more especially those charged with carrying out the so-called "social functions", that is, with compensating, without being given all the necessary means, for the most intolerable effects and deficiencies of the logic of the market— policemen . . . social workers, educators . . . should feel abandoned, if not disowned outright'. (Bourdieu et al., 1999: 183)

Entwined with experiences of harm and violence within local neighbourhoods, then, can be an entrenched pessimism about opportunities for change and transformation. It is thus, all the more remarkable when circumstances do appear transformed: when space does open up for substantial alteration in the conditions of both street and policy fields.

As Bourdieu argues, the relative autonomy of the symbolic order 'can introduce a degree of play into the correspondence between expectations and chances and open up a space of freedom' (Bourdieu, 1997: 234),

allowing space for a utopian sense of project or plan (Bourdieu, 1997: 235). As he argues, '[t]he belief that this or that future … is possible … can, in some historical conditions, mobilise a group around it and so help to favour or prevent the coming of that future' (Bourdieu, 1997: 235). While the impact of austerity has brought material disadvantage and cultural reproduction to the fore, these comments also allow the potential for alternative futures to be imagined; in other words, for an attentiveness to the 'cruel optimism' (Berlant, 2011) of hope. This brings us back to the potential of individuals able to wield legitimacy in multiple social spaces and thereby pursue change. For some, navigating the directives derived from the policy field whilst grappling with the social suffering on the street is a dispiriting, disempowering endeavour. For others, windows of opportunity arise to mobilize their 'sense of the game' from the street, alongside the communities they work with, to build a movement for change.

## Conclusion

The chapter has sought to introduce a conceptual vocabulary through which to interpret changes in public policy, and the street-based environments it purports to effect, to enable a textured analysis of continuity and change in violence reduction policy in Scotland and England. The divergent fields of policy and the street have been positioned as distinct and separate domains, positioned alongside the movement of individual actors within and between these contexts. While fields have particular embodied effects, in the form of an imprinted 'habitus' for those in its orbit (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), occupying plural (Lahire, 2011) or interstitial (Arrigoni, 2022) fields can result in a split habitus (Bourdieu, 2000) that manifests in a unique capacity to move outside the logics of a given field environment which, we argue, can create a space for revisioning the future. Following this conceptual work, the chapter then engaged with the concept social transformation to examine the conditions under which social change within the fields of policy and the street, engaging with recent translations of Bourdieu that foregrounded the role of charismatic leaders in conditions of crises in the instigating of what he termed 'symbolic revolutions'. Such change often involves a charismatic leader with a split habitus who simultaneously embodies high status and heretical rebellion creating the potential for movement, or play, within an established order (Bourdieu, 2017). Finally, the chapter engaged with Bourdieu's later work on social suffering, grounding

analysis in the contemporary dynamics of violence while probing the applicability of the concept of symbolic revolution to the street field. In seeking to document change in the community contexts in which violence occurs, and in the corridors of policy-making, these concepts seek to build a connective bridge between the forms of action in these distinct domains.

In sum, the chapter has sought to elaborate a framework that assesses the dynamic interaction of individual agents, situated discourse and systemic inequality as a way of understanding and scaling social change. Charismatic leaders can emerge in times of crisis and create spaces for change through narratives of hope. Changes in the policy field do not necessarily lead to changes in practice, nor directly into the street field. In the chapters that follow, we seek to apply this conceptual vocabulary to interrogate the historical, systemic and agentic circumstances that allowed for change to occur both at the level of policy and street in Scotland, and at the level of policy in England. Drawing on a comparative political economy of the relevant institutional cultures in both jurisdictions, we elaborate the inclement conditions that allowed this temporary state of exception to prevail, before turning attention to the task and promise of a criminology of hope.

# ON THE MOVE

Every time I get in the car now I can't help but think of you. You've been in and connected to my Bluetooth so many times all your daft names pop up every time I start the car. Honestly some of the best memories I have with you are from the car. That feeling when you're driving fast tunes blasting not a care in the world, all singing together. You can't beat it. Just the Two of Us with you giving it massive, hitting the high notes.

The first time I picked you up it was a choice between my wee Golf and another worker's Micra. It was no contest really. The Golf had kudos, you thought it was a sound motor and I loved it when you all piled in. Being in the car together brought us closer, there's something about all being a bit distracted and looking straight out the windscreen that gets your guard down. Thinking back it was often in the car when you opened up about what you were going through.

Being in the car together also meant showing up for you, literally. Like saying I'd be there at your door at a certain time then actually being there. It also meant you holding one another to account, on the WhatsApp group like are you ready, where are you, we're waiting, then off to the recording studio or the go-karting or any of the mad places we ended up, with a stop off for McDonald's or to buy vapes.

It was when we were making that first film that I realized how much it meant to you all as well. It was a bank holiday and the school was closed but you were all on the WhatsApp asking what are we doing today, and I came with the film guy and we drove round filming all sorts from the car. High rises, betting shops, Celtic Park, police vans, train stations, parks. And as we drove you starting talking about your lives and what these places meant.

I love that film. It starts with your hairy knees and white trainers walking up a set of steps, you're like what's going on here but then the camera pans up and you're at the top of Glasgow looking out across the full city like you're the kings. It's poignant too because it's also a graveyard, you can see gravestones all around as you look out over the city. And thinking about

it now death has been close by the whole time I've known you, not always talked about but there like those headstones.

Then the film goes on a bit and the tunes start and you just see 'WISE MEN' on the screen. I remember one of you, full of the patter one day and declaring 'What can ah say, were just four wise men' and we decided instantly that's what you'd be called. It's so so perfect. You are proper wise old heads on young bodies but also unconscious comedians, so so bright and funny. Like Jack and Victor in Still Game. And you're so appreciative, you don't talk about your feelings much but I know from a look or a word what you're thinking and trying to say. When you tell me *I appreciate that* I know you mean it. I know because I feel it too.

# 4
# A Violence Revolution?

*with Tilman Schwarze*

## Introduction

Despite its widely acknowledged beauty and charm, the nation of Scotland has long held a reputation as a violent country. Contrasting sharply with romanticized images of tartan-clad tenants tending flocks of sheep on Scottish hillsides, literary writers as far back as the sixteenth century have depicted Scots as a barbarous and savage people, accustomed to carrying weapons and engaging in routine violence (Kilday, 2019). An example of the deep-rootedness of this image can be found in Walter Scott's famous tale of *The Two Drovers*, published in 1827, in which an instance of wounded pride leads to a Scottish farmer plunging his dirk, or dagger, into the stomach of an English rival. Content that justice has been done, the Scotsman goes to his execution accepting that the taking of a man's life deserves the taking of his own. Over centuries, such illustrations, steeped in notions of masculinity, have become synonymous with the representation of Scotland. This long-standing image took on a particular salience in relation to the city of Glasgow with the publication of Alexander McArthur and Kingsley Long's notorious novel *No Mean City* (1956), based on McArthur's notes on his observations of the Gorbals in the 1920s. The novel's graphic descriptions of violence, drunkenness, and poverty was the cause of a great deal of controversy at the time of publication, concretizing an image of 'a filthy, slum-ridden, poverty-stricken, gang-infested city' (Damer, 1990: 5).

As with the so-called 'New York miracle' of crime reduction, the subsequent reduction in rates of violent crime in Scotland—with statistics showing a 48% decrease in non-sexual violent crime over a ten-year period (Scottish Government, 2016), including a 38% fall in homicide and 43% fall

in attempted murder and serious assault—helped contribute to a media-friendly narrative of recovery. As in New York, there was a cast of charismatic actors—including the leaders of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU)—and an overarching philosophy, in the form of the public health approach, that could make for ready copy. A headline in the UK Guardian, for example, profiled the VRU Director Karyn McCluskey as 'the woman who took on Glasgow's gangs' (The Guardian, 2011). International media also picked up on the narrative, with a headline from the Washington Post summarizing the radical shift from *No Mean City* stereotypes: 'Glasgow was once the "murder capital of Europe." Now it's a model for cutting crime' (Adam, 2018). Like the New York miracle before (Zimring, 2007), which was instrumental in influencing the exportation of the ZTP model, the dramatic reduction led to policy transfer of the public health approach to England and Wales, and further afield. As discussed in chapter 3, however, the evidence of cause-and-effect was far from robust (McVie, 2017). To paraphrase a famous saying, the story of violence reduction in Scotland had travelled halfway round the world before the evidence had its boots on.

   In this chapter, we seek to ground the story of violence reduction in Scotland in the wide-ranging data from the study, situating the transformation within the context of a Scottish policy 'field' which was itself in a state of flux in the aftermath of political devolution. In doing so, we draw from the first three elements of Petzke's formulation of a symbolic revolution: 1) a sense of impending crisis; 2) the reframing of debate and overcoming of opposites; and 3) the existence of a 'split habitus' in leadership of the movement (Petzke, 2022: 490).[1] We begin by first sketching out the available evidence on Scotland's relationship with interpersonal violence, highlighting particular periods of concern over the course of the twentieth century, before focusing on the impending crisis that emerged immediately following the turn of the century. Drawing on media reports, documentary evidence, interviewee testimony, and statistical reports, we define this period as one of significant transformation, allowing space for an alternative approach to tackling violence to emerge. Second, we trace the gradual reframing of public and political discourse on violence in Scotland from one in which polarized debates about welfare and punishment were gradually supplanted by the language of public health. Focusing on policy, practice, and the media, we argue that the emergence of a public health discourse

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[1] The fourth element, involving a re-interpretation of 'canonical sources within the field' will be discussed in chapter 5.

in the context of violence reduction can be framed as a symbolic revolution that 'install[s] conceptually new distinctions that fundamentally restructure the ways in which authority and legitimacy is assigned' (Petzke, 2022: 491). Thirdly, we examine the role of leadership—specifically the concepts of 'split habitus' and 'charismatic leadership'—and describe the growing chorus of people and personalities involved in building a movement for change during this period. In doing so, we explore the importance of combined leadership across both policy and street fields, and the significant role of individuals who were able to occupy a space between the two.

## A brief history of violence in Scotland

The historian Anne-Marie Kilday (2019), in a panoptic overview of violence in Scotland from 1660 to 1960, traces the deep-rooted perception of Scotland as a violent nation back to the sixteenth century. She describes a report from the scholar William Camden, from 1586, in which he describes the Scots as a barbarous people, who 'drink the blood out of the wounds of the slain' and Daniel Defoe in the early eighteenth century describing 'a hardened, refractory and Terrible people' (Kilday, 2019: 1), drawn to blood feuds and untamed impulse. Kilday suggests that this reputation was focused particularly on the Highlands of Scotland, site of the Jacobite Rebellion, amassing evidence from the work of other historians to suggest much of Scotland's history was relatively peaceable, and that this reputation was at times politically motivated. By contrast, Kilday pieces together historical evidence from court records and legal indictments that demonstrate a 'gradual decline' over the course of the nineteenth century, with the incidence of indictment for fatal violence 'never very great, save for a few post-war spikes in activity' which may have been 'caused by cumulative data being published to account for the years when statistics were not produced' (Kilday, 2019: 36).

Numerous studies have identified a connection between the brutalizing effects of war and post-war violence (Gartner and Kennedy, 2018), including Scotland where abnormal patterns of violence, including homicide and domestic abuse, were observed after the First World War (McKay, 2025). Similarly, in the years following the Second World War, most countries across Europe witnessed a steadily rising trend in violence (see Smith, 1995). Scotland was no exception and the number of non-sexual crimes of violence recorded by the police rose steadily until the turn of
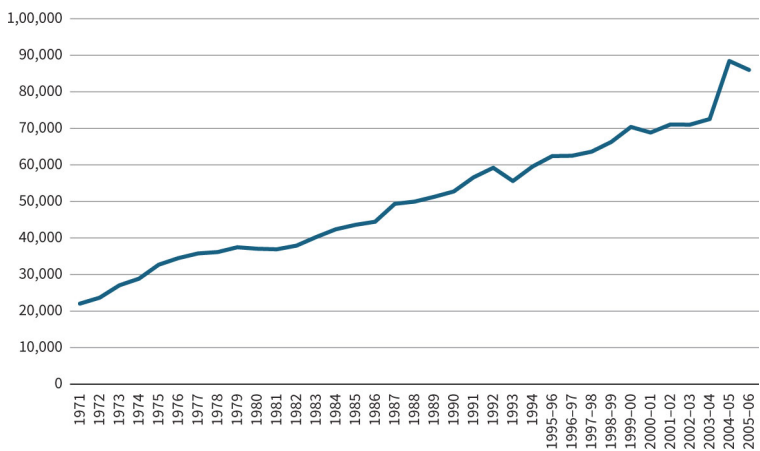
**Figure 4.1**   Number of crimes of non-sexual violence recorded in Scotland,
1971 to 2005/2006
*Source*: Scottish Government (2023a) Recorded Crime in Scotland 2022/23. Data Table 5.

the century (McVie, 2017). Figure 4.1 summarizes the trends in reported
crimes of non-sexual violence from 1971 to 2006. As illustrated from the
early 1970s to the turn of the century, the number of (non-sexual) violent
crimes recorded by the police in Scotland more than tripled from just over
20,000 to around 70,000 incidents.[2] There was a particularly sharp increase
after 2003–2004, with the number of violent incidents peaking at just over
91,000 in 2006–07.

The reasons for rising violence in the post-war period are multiple and
complex, and at least partially explained by changes in legislation, improve-
ments in police recording practices, shifts in public reporting habits, and
increasing consumerism (Reiner, 2000), as well as policies instituted as
part of the post-war peace-building process (Gartner and Kennedy, 2018).
However, as one participant reflected, the experience of violence during
wartime left deep emotional wounds:

> I think people came back from the First and Second World Wars trau-
> matized, experienced a level of violence which is pretty … I mean,

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[2] Based on the Scottish Government classification, this includes murder and culpable
homicide (including causing death through dangerous driving); serious assault and attempted
murder; common assault (involving little or no injury); and robbery.

I can't … I don't even have the words to say how significant that is on them. But then they came back, found ways of … like tried to cope with that, which, you know, there weren't good, coping mechanisms available. And often, there was a level of violence then, within homes, to children, to families, an accepted level of violence in schools, that was just … I mean, it's extreme, when I talk to, you know, like my husband and his friends. (Academic 1, Scotland)

In the post-war years, Scotland gained a reputation for a particular brand of violence, associated with its industrial heritage, hard drinking culture, and a tough macho identity, that placed it above others in terms of both severity and impact. Indeed, several studies have demonstrated that rates of serious or fatal violence in Scotland were higher than its neighbours south of the border (Smith, 1983; Soothill and Francis, 2002), especially in relation to knife-related homicide (Eades et al., 2007). Moreover, the use of knives and other sharp objects in Scottish homicide cases was noted to be consistently higher than every other European country for which data was available (UNODC, 2013).

While Scotland as a whole was perceived as a violent country, it was the 'No Mean City' of Glasgow that was the most frequent reference point. Until the late 1990s, this reputation was mainly based on anecdote and media headlines, as violence rates in Scotland were not published below police force area level. Between 1975 and 2013, Glasgow city was one of twelve council areas that made up Strathclyde Police, Scotland's largest territorial force. In 1997, however, the first police statistics published by council area showed that 5,655 non-sexual crimes of violence had been recorded in the city of Glasgow that year, representing 30% of all violent incidents in Scotland (Scottish Office, 1997), despite only 12% of the population living in the city.[3] Taking population size into account, the rate of violent crime in Glasgow was two and a half times the national average (92 per 10,000 people compared with 37 per 10,000, respectively)) (Scottish Office, 1997). Subsequent statistical reports over the following years produced similar figures, confirming that violence was consistently higher in Glasgow than other Scottish local authorities.

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[3] Population estimate for Glasgow city during 1997 is based on Mid-year Population Estimates Time Series Data published by the National Records of Scotland. See: https://web archive.nrscotland.gov.uk/20241128122057/https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-estimates/mid-year-population-estimates/population-estimates-time-series-data [accessed 10 June 2025].

What really distinguished Glasgow from other Scottish cities was its association with youth 'gangs'. It was famously described as a 'Scottish Chicago' (Davies, 2013) and portrayed in the media as a 'gang-infested city' (Damer, 1990: 5). Fraser (2015: 76) has observed that reports of gangs 'operated cyclically, with certain periods—notably the 1930s, 1960s and the 2000s—producing more interest and publicity'. In the 1930s, public concern over so-called 'razor gangs' prompted a city-wide crackdown by the then Chief Constable of Strathclyde Police, Percy Sillitoe (Sillitoe, 1956). While in the 1960s, gangs went from being unmentioned up until 1966 to public enemy number one (Bartie, 2010), resulting in the formation of a dedicated policing unit nicknamed 'The Untouchables', as well as a range of creative community responses (Armstrong and Wilson, 1973). One participant recalled the tangible nature of everyday violence while working in Glasgow during the late 1960s:

> In 1969, because I'd worked in a couple of hospitals in my summer holidays, I worked in the Glasgow Royal Infirmary and because I had all this experience, albeit that I was a social work student, I was kind of sent to what in those days was called Casualty. And that was a real eye-opener because the violence on the streets of Glasgow was there day in and day out. So, razor slashings, stabbings were, if not commonplace, were not uncommon. But what was striking to me was that almost every victim knew who the perpetrator was, so it wasn't kind of random people in the street being attacked or stabbed. (Retired Senior Social Worker, Scotland)

From the early 1970s until the turn of the century, the number of non-sexual crimes of violence recorded by the police in Scotland more than tripled from just over 20,000 to around 70,000 incidents. It is clear from historical accounts that this incremental rise in violence, especially episodes associated with working class youth culture, became 'defined as a threat to societal values and interests' (Cohen, 1972: 1) and was met with both public and political censure. Nevertheless, there was also a degree of quiet cultural acceptance that violence was just something that happened in Scotland which led to a certain stasis in the political response.

It was not until the issue gained prominence again at the beginning of the 2000s that it prompted more than criticism at the level of media and politics. It is this more recent period of history that marks the start of a symbolic revolution at the level of both policy and the street.

# The coming crisis

The early 2000s marked a period of renewed media scrutiny on interpersonal violence in Scotland. Reports of serious acts of violence started to proliferate in the media, with accounts of 'weekends of violence' (Evening Times, 2003) which saw serious injuries and homicide being described as commonplace. The high level of violence in Glasgow, when compared to other major cities, began to dominate the media headlines, such as, 'Glasgow Tops Murder League' (The Scotsman, 2001). Youth violence was identified as the major source of concern, 'Return of no fears grow as violent teenage gangs evoke unwanted memories of Glasgow's past' (Evening Times, 2003). Study participants from police, health, and community backgrounds recollected this period as one in which violence was an everyday concern. One police participant recalled: 'you would come into work and we used to talk about the brown paper bags lying everywhere with people's blood-stained clothing placed into it to let the blood dry out before you submit it for forensics' (Retired Senior Police Officer 3, Scotland). Another health professional remembered the period as one of, 'people getting slashed, stabbed, bottled, hit with baseball bats, et cetera' (Senior Health Professional 1, Scotland). A community leader similarly recalled, 'away back in 2003, you know, I would come in on a Monday… on a Monday I would always, most likely always, have heard there'd been a stabbing over the weekend, if not a fatality within the city' (Community Leader 1, Scotland).

The situation came to a head in 2005 when the annual number of violent incidents recorded by the police spiked sharply. In the same year, high profile media reports announced the publication of two international studies which had compared violence rates across countries. The first report, which appeared on the BBC news website (18 September 2005) reported on a United Nations (UN) study had identified Scotland as 'the most violent country in the developed world'. Days later, a newspaper article in The Guardian (26 September 2005) stated that a World Health Organization report had revealed 'Scotland has second highest murder rate in Europe'.[4] Following on from recent, high profile news stories about territorial gang

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[4] The claims made in these media articles are problematic in a number of ways and some of them have now been challenged by more recent data (Irwin-Rogers et al., 2025). Despite exhaustive searches, the project team were unable to locate either of the reports to which these media reports refer.

fighting in Glasgow, the issue of violence was once again thrust to the top of the political agenda, with the media acting as an important catalyst.

Following Petzke (2022), this sequence of events presented a sense of impending crisis to Scotland's political leadership. Occurring as it did in the early years of Scotland's devolved Parliament at Holyrood, with an enhanced civil service and engaged political class, the crisis was to set in motion a series of changes in both policy and practice. Nevertheless, the policy field was deeply contested at this time and the pathway to change was not a simple or linear one. It is to this shifting field environment that we now turn.

## Agonism and the policy field

The sense of impending crisis in Scotland's violence problem may have subsided had it not been for the fact that it coincided with a particularly turbulent time in Scottish political history. In 1999, following a referendum in which the public voted for greater powers to be transferred from the UK government, Scotland became a devolved nation and the first Scottish Parliament since 1707 was established at Holyrood (see McVie, 2017). Youth crime quickly came onto the political agenda of the inaugural government, a coalition between the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, and the issue became heavily politicized amid a wide-ranging programme of reform (McAra and McVie, 2023; Elliott, 2023). Interviews with senior civil servants working in government at the time highlight how seriously any threat to Scotland's reputation was taken. Participants recalled the government's urgent need to act swiftly and decisively during this early phase of devolution. According to one civil servant: 'at that very point that violence reduction was becoming a very significant issue. Clearly the homicide stats around that time were justifying the label of violence or homicide capital of Europe' (Senior Civil Servant 3, Scotland). And for another, concerns were focused centrally on young people: 'There was a lot of concern about young offenders. There were [sic] certainly ministerial concern about young offenders' (Retired Civil Servant 4, Scotland). The issue of violence brought with it a sense of national embarrassment to the fledgling government, prompting a sense of impending crisis and a need for action. As a civil servant recalls:

> I was down in England and I moved back to Scotland because the
> Parliament was there and I think that was a big motivation for me coming

back. And violence … once violence came along … I'm dearly, dearly at-
tached to the west coast of Scotland …. And I didn't like Glasgow being
seen as the murder capital of the world. It's the friendliest city in the
world. (Civil Servant 2, Scotland)

In the context of a nascent government trying to assert its political authority
over domestic matters, and beginning to wrestle with a 'governing habitus'
(Brangan, 2023) that differentiated Scottish politics from Westminster, the
media headlines about the United Nations and World Health Organization
reports prompted emergency meetings at the highest levels of government
and policing. Facing public criticism and public scrutiny, those in power
at both Holyrood and Strathclyde Police felt under increasing pressure to
'do something different'. Recollections of civil servants active in Scotland at
the time suggest that a lack of immediate alternatives influenced a renewed
focus on enforcement in general, and, stop and search, in particular. As one
participant recalled: 'I suppose it was an open door but there was very little
policy … distinctive policy … a distinctive policy framework there for it in
Scotland. So … and looking to the police, …their response was just going
to be increased stop and search, which they did' (Civil Servant 2, Scotland).

At least partly in response to public concern about violence and youth
gangs, the newly established Scottish Executive had appointed an Advisory
Group to examine the problem of youth crime and consider 'the scope for
improving the range and availability of options aimed at addressing the ac-
tions' of offenders (Scottish Executive, 2000: 1). As one senior policy official
recalled:

After devolution it was a Lib Dem/Labour coalition and I think that was
quite a tricky time actually. I think that the Coalition wanted what was
best for children and young people, no doubt about that. And probably
didn't want as much imprisonment, but it was also in the era of anti-
social behaviour, which I thought felt to me at the time certainly had a
big influence. (Retired Civil Servant 4, Scotland)

The appointment of a new First Minister in 2001 heralded a tougher stance
on youth offending than Scotland was used to, and a distinctly punitive
agenda emerged which espoused a 'fairly narrow emphasis on individual
responsibility and personal (and parental) accountability for the behav-
iour of young people, with a practice focus on correcting personal (and
parental) deficits' (McNeill and Batchelor, 2004:13–14). A series of policy

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**Box 4.1: Summaries of selected policy documents from Scottish Government (2000–2003)**

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I. It's a Criminal Waste: Stop Youth Crime Now (2000). This report emphasized the role of risk factors for youth crime and offending. The report concluded that more attention should be paid to older and more persistent and serious offenders for whom the criminal justice system should become the primary institution.

II. A Partnership for a better Scotland (2003). This report focused primarily on 'antisocial behaviour' and how reform of the courts and legal system could deal with this behaviour more efficiently. The goal of this reformation was to modernize the law and legal system to protect individual rights, focusing on individual risk factors.

III. Putting Our Communities First: A Strategy for Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour (2003). This report proposed that antisocial behaviour should be addressed through cooperation between a wide range of local agencies, including the police, local authorities, schools, health services, social workers, and community wardens.

Box 4.1: Box summarizing some of the Scottish Government's key policy documents on youth crime. Scottish Government policy documents in the early 2000s focused on persistent and serious offenders and highlighted the need for a robust approach to tackling antisocial behaviour.

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reports were published, including a '*Ten point action plan on youth crime*' (Scottish Executive, 2002), which set out a range of new measures to tackle the problem of persistent offending, including the re-introduction of youth courts and use of risk-factor analysis, as Box 4.1 summarizes.

Clearly drawing on 'broken windows theory' (Kelling and Wilson, 1982), the *Putting Our Communities First* policy document laid out the potential dangers of failing to deal adequately with antisocial behaviour in Scottish communities.[5] At the same time, however, the Scottish Executive were

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[5] These documents buttressed the development of the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004, which introduced a raft of legislative orders, replicating many of those available in England and Wales, such as Dispersal Orders, Parenting Orders and Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) for 12–15 year-olds.

drawing up plans for a child-centred approach to education that empha-sized that 'every child matters' in the context of providing better integrated children's services. Though the document, *For Scotland's Children* (Scottish Executive, 2001), made little reference to offending (McAra and McVie, 2025), its impacts were to be wide-ranging in its evolution into the flagship policy, 'Getting It Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC).

Early responses to the crisis, therefore, were marked by a flurry of activity involving a range of actors seeking to define, and respond to, the perceived problem, while contradictory policy decisions were running side-by-side. At the same time that Scottish Ministers were promoting justice-based approaches, such as ASBOs and Parenting Orders, others working in the policy field—particularly the civil servants within Children and Families—were developing strategies that were focused on improving the outcomes and well-being of children and young people. And at the centre of these apparent contradictory positions were the police, who were tasked with re-ducing endemic levels of violence.

## Policing the crisis

During the course of the 1990s, under the stewardship of two Chief Constables, Sir Leslie Sharpe and Sir John Orr, Strathclyde Police had de-veloped a policing strategy aimed at reducing violence, especially knife crime, in specific priority neighbourhoods. This included a series of pre-emptive campaigns involving police stop and search.[6] According to Murray (2014), these initiatives dovetailed with two prevailing trends in criminal justice: a situational agenda emanating from the Home Office, and a rise in zero tolerance policing in other jurisdictions. The braiding together of punitive and welfarist rationales was evident in the policing approach to tackling violence involving young people. As one police of-ficer put it:

> it was a kind of carrot and stick approach. . . . It's not like zero tolerance, but we're taking a very dim view if you're going to continue to take part in gang culture, and gang violence, and you go out there armed with a knife to harm somebody, we're going to take you off the streets. Very, very

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[6] Operation Dove (1992), Operation Blade (1993), and Operation Spotlight (1996).

firm. But as part of a broader sweep of diversionary measures, to per-
suade people that the choices are very stark, here. (Senior Police Officer
1, Scotland)

While a focus of the policing approach to reducing violence involved re-
newed efforts around enforcement at this time, including a ratcheting up of
stop and search (Murray and Harkin, 2017), the sense of impending polit-
ical crisis created space for a more radical course of action. With encourage-
ment from the Scottish Executive, the then Chief Constable of Strathclyde
Police, Sir Willie Rae, requested a report from the new head of intelligence,
Karyn McCluskey, on how to reduce levels of violence.

The result was the foundation of a new unit, involving a small team of
police officers and analysts, with a clear objective: to reduce homicide and
knife crime. Known as the 'Violence Reduction Unit' (VRU), the team was
led by Chief Superintendent John Carnochan, a veteran murder detective,
and Karyn McCluskey, a former nurse who was then head of Strathclyde
Police's Analytical Services. Working from the bowels of Pitt Street Police
Station in the city centre of Glasgow in a windowless room equipped with
a phone and a computer, the team was initially established with a remit
to cover violence in Glasgow. However, it soon became apparent that the
issue overspilled the city boundaries and, in 2006, the scope was extended
to the whole of Scotland. As one civil servant working in policing at that
time recalled: 'We think we could probably turn that into a national unit
because so many of the homicides are in Strathclyde anyway that we are
effectively only a hop and a skip really from that being a national unit
because there is not really that much violence' (Senior Civil Servant 3,
Scotland) due to the concentration of violence within the central belt of
Scotland.

The main area of concern during the early years of the VRU was
Scotland's homicide rate and the use of weapons, especially knives, which
was more prevalent than most other countries across Europe (McVie,
2017). Alongside a hard-line stop and search approach, the SVRU cam-
paigned that more needed to be done to get weapons off the street, and pro-
active measures would be necessary. An important moment in adopting
this approach was the successful identification of a suspect in the high pro-
file murder case of Farah Noor Adams, who was brutally murdered as she
walked along a Glasgow riverside in 2005. As the then Director of the VRU
recalled:

And we had a dreadful incident, a murder... Farah Noor Adams was her name, a young woman who was... murdered on the canal path up near Maryhill. A horrible thing. In the morning, dropped her kids off at school, went to her job and was murdered. And the Detective Super in charge of it was running an inquiry and I'd spoken to him about it and he was really struggling ...but he got a DNA hit. And the DNA hit was from a man who'd been stopped with a knife and had been arrested and taken to the office and had DNA taken because of that thing that we introduced. He had no previous convictions, he had one pending case for the knife and one for indecent exposure on the canal path, but about two miles away... I asked the SIO, 'how long would it have been before you'd have got him in your ... you know, in the net, if you started the parameters?' And he said, "we wouldn't have done. He wouldn't have popped into it. It was a stranger. And it could have been the first of many." So we made a deal of that. We contacted the cops who did it, we contacted the divisional commander and said, because you did that that night, you've caught a murderer and you have made it possible probably to prevent other murders because we did that one thing. So that was good ...because lots of the cops are saying, "Oh I'm not taking him up the street, I'd rather caution and charge him here, you know." (SVRU Former Director 1, Scotland)

Being processed for a knife-carrying offence, the perpetrator was listed on the DNA database which helped to achieve a subsequent conviction. This successful prosecution was seen to gain legitimacy for the VRU's preventative approach and, after successful lobbying from the VRU, Scotland's chief law officer, the Lord Advocate, issued new guidance relating to knife offences. Under these rules, police officers were instructed to arrest and take into custody anyone found in possession of a knife, with early court diets to ensure swift processing. This was further supported by ministers who worked hard to pass the Custodial Sentences and Weapons (Scotland) Act 2007, giving officers additional powers to stop and search those they suspected of carrying a knife. It was a fight that was hard won, however, as a former Director of the VRU recalls:

So we fundamentally changed the process so if you were caught with a knife, you were taken into custody, you were photographed, you were DNA'd, you were ... you know, you were fingerprinted.... That sounds

banal now 'cause I'm sure that people think, bloody hell, but can I tell
you that was huge, we got massive pushback over that. Massive push-
back. 'Cause people were saying, och well you're taking all these cops off
the streets. (SVRU Former Director 2, Scotland)

Within the policy field of Holyrood, it is clear that the apparent binaries
between welfare and punishment were not seen as oppositional. Echoing
the then UK Prime Minister's 'tough' dictum on crime, senior politicians
in Scotland recalled framing the new youth justice response in terms of a
'special combination':

it was a combination of —I think a unique and very special combination
of deterrents with measures like that and proper development action
to try and stop the causes, which everybody had talked about for years
but hadn't actually … probably hadn't really been done anywhere in the
UK. … There are some people who like this model because it is seen to be
dealing with causes and prevention and not just focused on prosecution.
But I don't think they fully understand that we also did the prosecution
side in Scotland, we weren't just being sympathetic to the causes and
trying to tackle them, we were also coming down very hard on the per-
petrators. (Politician 2, Scotland)

The high profile effort to bring a form of 'focused deterrence' to Glasgow
under the heading of CIRV, discussed in chapter 2, represented an im-
portant coming together of these so-called 'carrot and stick' approaches in
the form of policy mobility (Graham and Robertson, 2022). Balancing ro-
bust policing with wraparound support, the CIRV project represented an
important practical and symbolic moment in the reframing of the debate.
From the original model of robust gang policing tactics accompanying so-
cial supports (Braga and Kennedy, 2021), the CIRV approach evolved to suit
the Glasgow context. As one police participant recalled: 'in Cincinnati, it
was very much adults involved in violence. In Glasgow, it was more, young-
sters. So, we were taking on a different perspective, a different viewpoint,
which was much more a prevention message, as well, to try and stop people,
an early intervention project' (Retired Senior Police Officer 5, Scotland).
One youth worker recalled the impact:

I remember on the very first one I was so sceptical, I was like, this is a
lot of fucking shit. … we had a judge standing, I'm going to fucking jail

you and da, da, da, and all the young team are just like, fuck off you dick, sit down … I think there were probably about 70 or something in the court room from different areas across the east end and they were all eyeballing each other and all the rest of it. And I thought, this is a nightmare. But then a mum got up to speak about losing her son. The whole court went quiet and you could have heard a pin drop. And I thought … I looked at all the young people we were working with who were hardcore and all the piss taking and all that stopped. And I thought, you know what, I'm going to eat my words.    (Community Leader 1, Scotland)

While the establishment of the SVRU marked a major turning point in terms of a public health response to violence, there were also parallel shifts at play within government policy-making. The increasing centrality of children and young people across the Scottish Executive's wider policy portfolios created space for innovative policy windows to open up. Led by the civil servants who had been working in parallel with Scottish Ministers during the early punitive phase of youth justice policy-making, a new policy document titled *Getting It Right for Every Child* (GIRFEC) was published by the Scottish Executive in 2006. One of the last policy initiatives of the coalition government, GIRFEC was to become a policy thread which continued with enhanced gusto under the new Scottish National Party (SNP), who swept into power with a majority government in 2007. With a distinctive nationalist rhetoric that, 'Scotland would be the best place to grow up', one of the new Scottish Government's deliberate first acts would be to depoliticize the issue of youth offending and reframe it through the lens of child well-being, in the context of a holistic focus on societal governance instituted through a national performance framework (Elliott, 2023).

## Reframing the debate

Through GIRFEC, the Scottish Executive initiated a reorientation towards policy frameworks which centred the child at the core of all actions and legislative procedures in Scotland, creating space for a significant reframing of violence as an issue of public health. The GIRFEC policy document was not a hastily drawn up strategy paper produced to fill the void of the Scottish Executive's failed efforts to transform youth justice through a raft of punitive initiatives. Rather, it was a carefully crafted document that has been described as a 'landmark children's policy framework for improving

children's well-being in Scotland' (Coles et al., 2016, 335). Embraced and expanded by the incoming Scottish Government in 2007, GIRFEC succeeded in breaking the pendulum of the welfare-punishment dichotomy by reorienting the policy field towards a framework that placed children's needs and rights at the core of all policy and practice, introducing a holistic approach to thinking about children's needs and wellbeing (Scottish Government, 2012). In the words of the Scottish Government (2010: 3), GIRFEC was 'the golden thread that knits together our policy objectives for children and young people'. Described as one of the most comprehensive and holistic approaches to children's well-being and rights in Europe, the policy reflects 'the epitome of the Scottish approach, Scotland's idiosyncratic policymaking style (in comparison with, for example, the UK government and other welfare regimes)' (Coles et al., 2016: 336–337). GIRFEC's strategy for improving children's well-being and rights included a combination of early intervention, universal service provision, and multi-agency coordination. More importantly, however, it opened a policy window for reframing the debate about violence and enabled the evolution of a public health approach.

Over time, the GIRFEC principles became embedded in a range of policy areas, covering mental health, poverty reduction, prevention of offending, and parenting, and largely received cross party support. As Figure 4.2 illustrates, there was a striking growth in policies rooted in principles of early intervention, holistic support, and prevention of harm, which underlined the same principles as the public health approach. This was particularly notable in the field of youth offending, where a new Whole System Approach was introduced to deal with young people who were displaying challenging behaviours or coming into contact with the law (McAra and McVie, 2025).

Through the development of these policies, supported by a majority SNP Government, the apparent binaries of welfarist and punitive policies that had been such a feature of the previous administration were increasingly supplanted by principles that were already well established within the field of public health, with strong advocacy from both the VRU and the then Chief Medical Officer, Sir Harry Burns. The notion of a 'public health approach' aligned with vision of the VRU which was increasingly likening violence in the city to a disease to be prevented, gathering evidence to understand the root cause, exploring potential antidotes, understanding the environment of the patient, and trying to find the best course of preventative treatment. Importantly, the SNP Government continued to support the work of the VRU and 'there started to be this talk of a Scottish

**Figure 4.2**  Selected Government policies that refer to GIRFEC (2008–2020)

approach… they wanted Scotland to do something different, and approach things from a different perspective' (Academic 1, Scotland).

The basic principle of treating the upstream causes of violence rather than the after-effects was an idea that resonated strongly with the SNP-led Government and started to reflect in its actions and public messaging. In 2008, the Justice Minister, Kenny MacAskill, instituted a new *Cashback for Communities* scheme, taking funds recovered through the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and investing them into community programmes, facilities and activities targeted largely, although not exclusively, at young people at risk of engaging in crime and antisocial behaviour. In the same year, the VRU hosted a World Health Organization summit, where the then Health Secretary, Nicola Sturgeon, announced that Scotland would adopt a 'public health' approach to violence, stressing the need for prevention.[7] Moreover,

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[7] Notably, the SVRU was the first police service to join the WHO's Violence Prevention Alliance.

these changes in the policy field were also being mirrored at the level of practice in a development we characterize as a 'growing chorus'.

Echoing Petzke's conception of a 'symbolic revolution', the emerging consensus around early intervention and public health represented an important reframing of the terms of debate on the subject of violence involving young people. From senior leaders to youth practitioners, there began to be an increasing recognition that the principles of public health approaches were necessary to achieve violence reduction. Across a range of agencies, participants spoke of an attitudinal shift which no longer accepted violence as an inevitability but rather something that could be prevented, and required a greater understanding of the causes behind it. For example, one social worker remarked on the change to risk practice in social work: 'So, we used to do those sort of tick boxes and someone would be at risk of re-offending… we designed something that was pretty radically different.… It's not about labelling young people … it's about a different way. We need to understand'. (Frontline Social Worker 2, Glasgow) The chorus began to take on a momentum that was unprecedented in many ways, from the range of participants to the breadth of areas in which public health narratives were now being discussed.

While these systemic changes within the policy field were significant to the adoption of public health approaches to violence reduction in Scotland, the issue of leadership was critical. Without robust leadership at different levels, it is unlikely that the success of the violence reduction movement would have been so sustained. In the next section, we discuss Bourdieu's concept of 'split habitus' as it relates to leadership of the movement for change, with particular reference to the work of the SVRU.

## Leadership and split habitus

Petzke suggests that those who inhabit leadership positions within movements for symbolic revolution are often individuals with what Bourdieu has termed a 'split habitus'—occupying a contradictory position between two fields but with the capacity to resolve these tensions by forming a new orthodoxy. Such leaders, Bourdieu argues, may be heretics from within the system who are 'predisposed to reconcile the irreconcilable' (Petzke, 2022: 495), and may be 'ill at ease in both of the worlds within which they feel torn and which they subvert' (Bourdieu, 2017: 302; cited in Petzke,

2022: 495). Arguably, one of the main factors in the symbolic reframing of violence in Scotland was the leadership of individuals with a split habitus, hybrid social actors that occupied a space between fields. Holding such an 'elite' position enabled leaders of this particular movement to act as 'bridge builders' (Berger, 2024: 18).

Those who were tasked with heading up the VRU have been widely credited as the trailblazers who changed the narrative around violence in Scotland. John Carnochan and Karyn McCluskey, in particular, became prominent advocates for taking a public health approach to reducing violence, skilfully used their knowledge and prior experience to bring credibility and legitimacy to their communication strategy. A very persuasive double act—bringing together two extremes within the police. John Carnochan was a veteran murder detective with years of experience of dealing with the aftermath of violent incidents in the street field, experiencing what one participant termed, 'a Damascan kind of shift' from the established police habitus toward an appreciation of the logic of other fields such as health. This 'road to Damascus' moment represented, for another participant, an important lightning rod for a broader set of tangible shifts:

> He [Carnochan] had grown up in Scotland, he was a good cop, he investigated murders. . . . He framed violence and murder in the way his culture had taught him to frame it, as violence. And he just thought violence is just part of life, like air is part of life. So, a different way of framing it, the idea that actually you could do away with violence . . . it has to come from a rebel. It has to come from somebody who is not just doing things in the ordinary way. (Academic 2, Scotland)

This narrative shift was echoed by a senior civil servant who described Carnochan as, 'a grizzled Strathclyde police detective who says … I have spent thirty five years like Taggart tracking all these guys down and then suddenly the veil has fallen from my eyes and I am seeing things differently' (Senior Civil Servant 3, Scotland).

McCluskey, a former nurse, drew on first hand experience of dealing with the physical consequences of knife crime at street level to promote the benefits of targeting upstream causes within the policy context. She was able to drive innovative policing approaches whilst leading the intelligence division amidst an entrenched 'cop culture' (Atkinson, 2017), albeit with some suspicion, as she recollects:

I was quite new. They didn't know me. I hadn't been in Strathclyde Police. They thought I was, like, some bizarre, you know . . . I don't know, I was talking about hypothetical stuff. And . . . you know, so there was a bit of a suspicion. So . . . and it was, sort of, having John there who was very inculcated in Strathclyde probably . . . I hate to say this now because as a woman I always find this quite challenging, you know, it's he gave you a kudos". (SVRU Former Director 2, Scotland)

Both powerful communicators, the VRU leaders were able to move between social spaces, occupying a credible position of legitimate authority in both street and policy domains. In turn, the SVRU came to occupy a 'distinct sub-space' between policing, health, and community contexts, offering what Arrigoni refers to as an 'unsettling ambiguity' that leads to sticky influence (Arrigoni, 2022: 1287). Participants spoke of them as being, 'held up as these, sort of, great game changing, sort of, community actors' (Journalist 2, Scotland), or standing out as 'people who transcended the boundaries' (Academic 1, Scotland). Their unique characteristics helped each to legitimate their individual position within the leadership sphere: 'I think it mattered that John was a six foot Glasgow cop, and he felt cop-ish. And it mattered that Karyn was a woman and that she was bolshie [rebellious]' (Academic 2, Scotland). And, together, they made a powerful combination, as a former Chief Medical Officer for Scotland recalls:

You know, they were clever, insightful people with personality and, you know, no one's going to take any snash from those two. They just knew what needed to be done and they set out to do it and they carried it through. So, they were powerful personalities and clever with it and insightful. (Senior Health Professional 2, Scotland)

Acting both within and between organizations enabled the SVRU to take their violence message to a range of new audiences and, in the process, became endowed with 'a kind of tincture, a special element or quality' (Turner, 2003: 9). Threadgold notes, symbolic revolutions are often prompted by 'subversive innovators' formed not by 'individual genius' but 'specific fields' (Threadgold, 2020), with their shared experience itself bridging policing and health. Journalists and news editors agreed. As will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6, the media were an important tool in communicating this new message. One participant describes:

The media part of their work was really important. And finding somebody like that guy Carnochan, he banged up all those baddies and he's been in fights with criminals, literally, he knows what he's on about, doesn't he? And so even if the analysts and Karyn McCluskey and other folk who were also creating the stuff, the image of hard police officers saying soft things was so powerful—and he wasn't alone, others did the same thing right through the ranks of the then Strathclyde Police—that it became a really compelling newspaper narrative. (Journalist 1, Scotland)

Despite being part of Strathclyde Police, a major challenge for the VRU leaders was to establish faith that a public health approach would be effective within the policing community, so that they could gain acceptance and support from within their own organization. As Bourdieu notes, leaders of symbolic revolutions often occupy a position of legitimate authority—the position of a 'heretic' from within the existing system—with one participant describing how the VRU benefited from 'top cover' from senior leaders in policing. One ex-policing participant pointed to the significant role of the then Chief Constable, Sir Willie Rae, in supporting the SVRU, and described him as: 'someone who was hugely empowering and caring about it and thoughtful. And he basically said to them, go for it, and if there's any flak, that's my flak. So, the first condition for that was leadership' (Retired Senior Police Officer 3, Scotland). Such strong support at the highest levels of policing undoubtedly enabled the VRU to challenge orthodox views about the appropriate response to tackling violence.

In retracing the history of the evolution of the public health approach in Scotland, it is evident that the existence of individuals with a 'split habitus', embodying yet challenging established modes of authority, represented an important element in the movement for change. Indeed, the growing chorus reflected the coming together of a wide range of key actors, many of whom also occupied spaces that bridged between differing fields, the leaders of which represented powerful advocates across multiple sectors and were invested with a powerful status.

## The space between fields

As Liu suggests, movement between 'overlapping' or 'interstitial' fields requires what he terms 'brokers', who can build connections and facilitate exchange (Liu, 2021), and in the case of the SVRU this was enabled

by a leadership that was able to straddle different environments and create 'boundary zones' (Arrigoni, 2022) composed of individuals with a shared sense of purpose. This included Sir Harry Burns, a Professor of Public Health Medicine who moved into the policy field to serve as the Chief Medical Officer from 2005 to 2014. Burns played an influential role in viewing Scotland's various health problems through an inequalities lens and highlighting the links between social conditions and incidence of disease, including violence and knife crime. His influence was remarked on by one participant:

> If Harry Burns as the Chief Medical Officer had said that's a silly idea, we'd be in a different place. So, it takes the courage to go tell me more about that weird thing. But because you had legitimate committed authoritative voices bringing this new weird idea, people could start to take it onboard. If they had been hippies, and they had not looked like they were part of the system, that idea would not have been taken on in the same way. (Academic 2, Scotland)

Another leader in the growing chorus was Maureen McKenna an ex-schoolteacher who became the Director of Education for the city of Glasgow in 2007. Against a backdrop of school closures and extreme deprivation, McKenna played a key role in cutting school exclusion rates and improving attainment levels across the city, a period during which youth offending reportedly fell by around 50% (The Herald, 2021).

Over time, participants described a growing movement that brought together senior leaders and youth practitioners. This involved the coming together of leading voices in education, health and the third sector to embed the principles of primary prevention in institutions other than the criminal justice system. Alongside the high profile CIRV programme that the SVRU had implemented, further partnerships were to follow. Medics Against Violence (MAV), established by three Glasgow surgeons in 2008, began to deliver bespoke lessons on the dangers of knife crime. The US-inspired Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) initiative was set up to deliver violence prevention to a select number of schools in Scotland, which was generally well received by staff and students (Williams and Neville, 2017). No Knives Better Lives (NKBL) campaign was launched in 2009 with government funding, to support peer education and community based engagement. At the same time, multiple local charities in the east end of Glasgow, such as Family Action in Rogerfield and Easterhouse (FARE) and

Possibilities for Each and Every Kid (PEEK), developed and implemented bespoke intervention programmes.

With support from senior leaders in politics and across public service, the VRU led a 'growing chorus' of voices that engaged practitioners and community workers in a shared dialogue. Ministers provided significant backing for the VRU and were happy for the VRU to be focal points during public debates around violence. One senior politician at the time described the relationship between the VRU and government as 'transactional', supported by a positive working relationship with civil servants, 'they kept us informed and we would be, kind of, keeping an eye and watching and, you know, and also trying to, kind of, promote that, where that was the right thing' (Politician 1, Scotland). In addition, it was felt that the VRU provided an important level of legitimacy in delivering public health messaging around violence, to the extent that direct messages to the public from the VRU, rather than politicians, were likely to be more successful in changing hearts and minds:

> From a political perspective, it was very good to be able to put John out there because I could go on the telly and say things and folk would say …he's some namby-pamby political liberal who was a lawyer. He would say that. John went on, you know, and not meant to [be disparaging of him …], but he looked like a copper, you know, even in his, you know, civvies. …he talked the talk, he walked the walk, he looked it. So, he said let me tell you, you know, I've been a copper for twenty years, if I thought locking them all up, I would be your man, he resonated. So, we just rolled him out and, you know, it was his ideas, all we did was stand back and support. (Politician 3, Scotland).

Participants frequently cited the significance of the leadership of the Violence Reduction Unit in leading this growing chorus. As one former Justice Minister in the Scottish Executive, summarized, 'I think maybe the VRU spearheaded a lot of things which then led to culture change within the police … health … criminal justice system' (Politician 1, Scotland). Similarly, this period saw the growth of organizations which were able to occupy spaces between different fields. As one participant explained:

> So, this is too simplistic, but you could see it in three tiers of voices. … But there were some very prominent voices because they were in legitimate posts, in respected posts. … So they are in legitimate formal

professional posts. And then there was like a middle tier …who were passionate people who were speaking from either personal or professional expertise …. And then there will be a whole lot of other people that will be much less known, but they'll be like the people within individual nurseries who are bringing practice change. Who will be leaders in nurseries … or headteachers in schools or social workers who then worked to change the language that is in reports.… But they could not have done this without these other tiers … the top tier legitimized all of this. (Academic 2, Scotland)

The work of the VRU may have been the impetus for stakeholders across these tiers to develop complementary violence prevention initiatives and policy shifts in Scotland over the years, but they were also driven by an inherent belief in the value of listening to, and taking seriously, professional and lived experience in the areas of violence and violence prevention. As will be discussed further in chapter 5, a significant driver of these shifts was the role of stories of personal transformation that allowed policymakers and practitioners to connect their everyday work with a hopeful vision of violence reduction. One education participant recalled, 'we sat and we watched John Carnochan speaking about all that, and I suppose, you know, the kind of key messages that I bring out to staff is that, you know, our children are shaped by their experiences, and it's not always … it's not a choice' (Frontline Education 1, Scotland). Another participant recalled a 'lightbulb moment':

> She [Karyn McCluskey] showed us that CCTV footage of that young lad committing murder in the centre of Glasgow. I know a lot of people say they don't have a lightbulb moment, but that was a lightbulb moment for me because I had never actually considered how people came about the injuries that I was treating. (Senior Health Professional 1, Scotland)

It is clear that the work of Scotland's Violence Reduction Unit both stimulated, and moved with, a broader tide of initiatives and policy shifts that were rooted in the principles of early intervention, holistic support, and harm prevention. However, it is important to be cautious about relying on easy or simple narratives of cause and effect. As one civil servant stated, there is 'a real danger that we mythologize, valorize, the VRU as a kind of untouchable thing'. (Senior Civil Servant 3, Scotland)

The growing chorus was characterized by one participant as a 'movement': 'it was a movement that started. And nobody …can take responsibility for a movement. You're just part of it' (Academic 1, Scotland). And it is clear, with the benefit of hindsight, that this growing chorus was contributing to a discursive shift in policy and practice right across Scotland. Concepts such as 'Adverse Childhood Experiences', 'trauma', and 'prevention', which today would be considered commonplace, were at that time just finding an audience. As one participant reflected, this change in narrative was of great significance: 'I think the narrative is very important. The terminology that's used, the imaging that's used, the whole discussion… I think it's important in different ways' (National Charity Manager 2, Scotland). The strength, depth and breadth of this movement across a relatively small nation like Scotland was able to gain momentum and generate impact. As one academic participant reflected: 'Here is why I think this worked in Scotland. It was all those voices. It was this whole range of voices who were saying the same thing and repeating the same message and backing each other up in all sorts of ways'. (Academic 2, Scotland)

## Conclusion

Scotland's long-standing reputation for violence, which grew steadily over many decades, came to a head in the early 2000s. Against this backdrop, the events of the last two decades mark a seismic shift in Scotland's approach to dealing with a long-standing and wicked social problem. In this chapter we have framed these events using three parameters from Petzke's formulation of a symbolic revolution, which illustrate in broad terms the key catalysts that were instrumental in implementing real and meaningful change. A sense of impending crisis was heralded by both national statistics which showed a staggering increase in police recorded incidents of non-sexual violent crime and by high profile media reports of global comparisons which placed Scotland, and Glasgow, at the top of international violence league tables. Coming at a time of significant political turbulence, the topic of violence ascended quickly to the top of public and policy debate, bringing a sense of urgency amongst those in power to 'do things differently'. Within both the policy and practice fields, a series of competing narratives clashed around the need to dispense punishment and use hard enforcement tactics, while at the same time remaining true to welfare based rationales on

which juvenile justice had been underpinned for decades. The framing of the debate was contested and various actors took different positions in an effort to reshape the dialogue around Scotland's violence problem. A series of charismatic leaders emerged within this space, many of them benefiting from a split habitus that gave them the legitimacy to reshape the narrative away from punishment towards 'public health' and create a growing chorus of voices who joined in their agreement to tackle the root causes rather the symptoms of the disease. This movement, undergirded by many actors across policy domains and fields of expertise, created what would only later be recognized as a violence revolution.

The ultimate outcome of the growing chorus was to reframe the nature of the debate on violence across many institutions, championing public health messages, and advocating a new vision for the future. However, a critical stimulus for the growing movement towards a new approach to violence reduction, we would argue, can be found in the fourth criterion for Petzke's formulation: the return to canonical sources of legitimacy. But rather than situating such sources within religious or legal doctrine, as in Petzke's formulation, we make the case that legitimacy was garnered through the art of storytelling—what one interviewee referred to as 'a thousand small sanities' (SVRU Former Director 2, Scotland). And so, our canonical sources represent the value placed on authentic stories of transformation and recovery of those within another of Bourdieu's fields: the street field. It is to this aspect of Scotland's violence journey that we turn to in chapter 5.

# 5
# The Glasgow Miracle?

## Introduction

The city of Glasgow, Scotland, is founded on the legend of St Mungo, who reputedly performed four miracles on the banks of the Molendinar Burn in the sixth century. His feats are immortalized in the city's coat of arms, as well as the famous lines by the Scots poet Edwin Morgan, *The bird that never flew/The tree that never grew/The bell that never rang/The fish that never swam*. In addition to these four miracles, St Mungo reputedly performed a fifth, lesser-known, miracle. Attempting to preach to the people of Glasgow on a flat plain, he found his voice would not carry. Instead of giving up, or preaching only to those closest, he raised the earth under his feet into a mound, from which he could be seen and heard by all. The story of Glasgow's reduction in violence, therefore, taps not only into the deep story of violence in the city but also of recovery and redemption.[1]

In the chapter 4, we applied three components of the concept of symbolic revolution to the movement that formed around violence reduction in Scotland; an impending crisis, the reframing of debate, and leadership and split habitus. The political and media concern about a crisis in violence prompted action, leading to the foundation of a dedicated Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU). In turn, a growing chorus of voices emerged echoing public health language which helped to reframe the debate within the policy field. This was enabled, in part, by the ability of leaders within the movement to occupy spaces between policy and street fields, creating space for an alternative paradigm. The fourth criterion for

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[1] Elements of this chapter were previously published in A Fraser and F Gillon, 'The Glasgow Miracle: Storytelling, violence reduction and public policy' (2023) 28(3) *Theoretical Criminology* 328–345.

Petzke's formulation, namely the return to canonical sources for legitimacy, will form the focus of the current chapter. However, rather than anchoring the new orthodoxy in established religious or legal doctrine, as in Petzke's (2022) formulation, we make the case that legitimacy was garnered through the art of storytelling.

This chapter will analyse the significance of narrative in the 'success story' of violence reduction in Glasgow. While evidence of effectiveness of the public health approach is complex, in this chapter we argue that its appeal lay less in concrete evaluation and more in its storied character. The receptiveness of national and international audiences to the story of Scottish success took place against a backdrop of renewed interest in Scottish independence, in which national stories of redemption, hope, and renewal featured prominently. In this context of crisis and renewal, a space was opened for a form of iconoclastic 'charismatic authority' (Weber, 1968; Oommen, 1967) that combined tradition and experimentation to tell a different story of violence. Drawing from interviews with stakeholders across community, youth work, education, policing and health, as well as statistical data at both national and local level, the chapter will elaborate the role of stories, storytellers, and audiences in the evolution of public health approaches to violence reduction in Scotland.

The chapter is set out in four parts. First, drawing on narrative criminology, we analyse the relationship between stories, evidence and narrative. In the case of Scotland, the apparent reduction in violence contributed to a narrative that stretched beyond the national context to Scotland's reputation in the world. Setting these in conversation with its subsequent interpretation, we explore the tensions between narrative, data, and storytelling. Second, we explore some of the national level factors that contributed to the development of this narrative, analysing the peculiarities of Scotland as a small jurisdiction for the flow of storytelling, and the significance of 'folk heroes' in Scottish cultural life. Third, we explore the significance of stories themselves in the narrative of violence reduction in Glasgow. By focusing on two stories within the work of the VRU—David's Story and The Glasgow Boys—we highlight the significance of audience and storytelling to the building of a narrative around the public health approach. Finally, we reflect on the potential within stories to bridge between fields, and the consequences for other stories that go untold, exploring complexity that was masked beneath the story of success.

# Stories and narrative

Recent years have seen a resurgence of abiding interest in the significance of stories in 'instigating, sustaining, or effecting desistance from harmful action' (Presser and Sandberg, 2015: 1). Drawing from a diverse theoretical foundation, narrative approaches seek to connect the storied construction of crime and harm with individual belief structures and self-justifications (Fleetwood et al., 2019). While much narrative analysis seeks to connect personal stories with wider narrative structures, recent studies have also pointed to the significance of narrative in public policy (Annison, 2021). While much scholarship in the burgeoning field of narrative criminology uses the terms 'story' and 'narrative' interchangeably (Presser and Sandberg, 2015), in our analysis we seek to draw an analytical distinction. Following De Fina (2003), we approach narratives as 'texts that recount events in a sequential order' (2003: 11), where A follows B in a temporally ordered sequence. An example might be that (A) Scotland employed a public health approach to violence reduction, and (B) violence reduced significantly. A story, while following a similar sequential pattern, has the added element of storytelling, drama, and performance. In a story, there is (A) a rupture or disturbance, followed by (B) a series of challenges to a central protagonist, leading to (C) a conclusion or resolution. As De Fina (2003: 14) notes, stories 'tell past events, revolve around unexpected episodes, ruptures or disturbances of normal states of affairs or social rules, and convey a specific message and interpretation about those events and/or the characters involved'. To take the same example, (A) violence reached epidemic levels in Scotland, which led to (B) the work of the Violence Reduction Unit overcoming obstacles, leading to (C) the reduction in violence in Scotland. While the former example sets out a basic cause-and-effect, the latter involves characters, drama and plot.

So-called 'basic plots' (Booker, 2004) are fundamental story shapes that recur in both classical and contemporary storytelling, such as 'rags to riches' or 'tragedy'. According to Booker, stories conform to a number of standard narrative arcs, and the sanctity of these hold some deeper psychological significance. There are numerous examples of the basic plots in mythology, literary classics and popular culture. This familiarity allows 'stories' from distinctive policy and practice areas to tether to our social conscience as they fit a pattern of which we are already aware. Stories, importantly,

represent an oral tradition in which tales are recast and reinterpreted—and which can travel across time and space. Particularly when told by powerful individuals, stories have the ability to transcend reality, enabling their flow across and between jurisdictions. Here, we suggest that while narratives may be more confined by the logic of the particular field in which they are told (Sandberg and Fleetwood, 2017)—in this case the policy field—stories have the capacity to move more freely. As Presser and Sandberg argue, 'most importantly, narrative criminology takes stories to be social forces in their own right, rather than merely stores of information about social forces' (Presser and Sandberg, 2019: 133).

Stories, as Roe argues, 'underwrite and stabilize the assumptions for policy-making institutions that persist with many unknowns, a high degree of interdependence, and little, if any, agreement' (Roe, 1994: 34). Such narratives help ground and reduce elements of the uncertainties that are endemic in the world of the policymaker, reducing complexity and offering a form of explanation that can be 'operationalized into standard approaches with widespread application' (1994: 36). When reflecting on the development of the movement that enabled a public health approach to violence reduction in Scotland, for example, participants talked vocally and repeatedly about the significance of stories and storytelling. As one person stated, stories mattered more than evidence:

> But I'm really trying to speak to stories matter hugely, and in fact I now think stories are the most effective mechanism of change. So, I don't actually . . . I think evidence matters . . . . But evidence doesn't drive change. Stories drive change. (Academic 2, Scotland)

Here, we suggest that one of the primary conduits through which the mobilization around violence reduction occurred was through the use of stories to bridge between different field environments, tapping into a deep national story of exceptionalism. When the story entered into the policy field of Westminster, as we shall see, it became a narrative of cause and effect, like that of crime reduction in New York, in the context of the neoliberal logics of New Public Management. The narrative tethering of violence reduction to the public health approach generally, and the SVRU specifically, is one that took on political expediency. Before assessing the role of storytelling in the construction of the 'Glasgow miracle', then, we first explore the 'data story' which prompted the initial movement, before analysing the role of storytelling in building a successful narrative of transformation.

## Storytelling by numbers

Over the period 2005–2015, Scotland experienced a substantial reduction across the three most serious—but least common—categories of violence. As illustrated in Figure 5.1, this represents a clear and consistent pattern of reduction for the three most serious categories of violence. Homicide[2] and robbery started to decline first, followed by serious assault/attempted murder, then common assault. Robbery had the largest relative decline, falling by 71% from its highest point in 2002/2003 to its lowest point in 2015/2016. The other two serious violence groups also declined substantially: serious assault and attempted murder fell by 58% from its highest level in 2004/2005 to its lowest point in 2015/2016, while homicide fell by 55% from its high point in 2002/2003 to its lowest point in 2014/2015.

These significant and sustained reductions, which were also substantiated by victimization survey and hospital data (Scottish Government, 2023a, 2023b) became a critical element in the development of Scotland's public health journey. Slowly the media narrative in Scotland changed from one of disapprobation to one of success, such as, 'Violence: Scotland fights back' (The Herald, 2007). As one journalist interviewed for the study reflected: 'there was cynicism in those parts of the media about those crime figures going down. But, nevertheless, it became a story which even they couldn't ignore ... so you had that whole period where there was a good news story to tell. And suddenly those numbers start hitting a floor' (Journalist 1, Scotland). Before long, the SVRU, its initiatives and its leaders became regular features in the Scottish media cycle, with headlines such as, 'Ten-year bid to cut violence in Scotland' (Glasgow Times, 2007). Photographer David Gillanders spent time with individuals and communities affected by violence in Glasgow and the practitioners trying to support them, to produce shocking and poignant pictures published in national newspaper The Daily Record (2007), as part of a series titled, 'Living on a knife edge' (Forsyth et al., 2010).

As noted in chapter 4, the city most traditionally associated with groups of young men using weapons in public places was Glasgow, with its long-standing issues of territorial 'gang' rivalry (Fraser, 2015). Nevertheless, police data demonstrated that Glasgow experienced a steeper fall in violence than other parts of Scotland following the introduction of the VRU

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[2] This measure of homicide includes murder and culpable homicide, and death by dangerous driving.
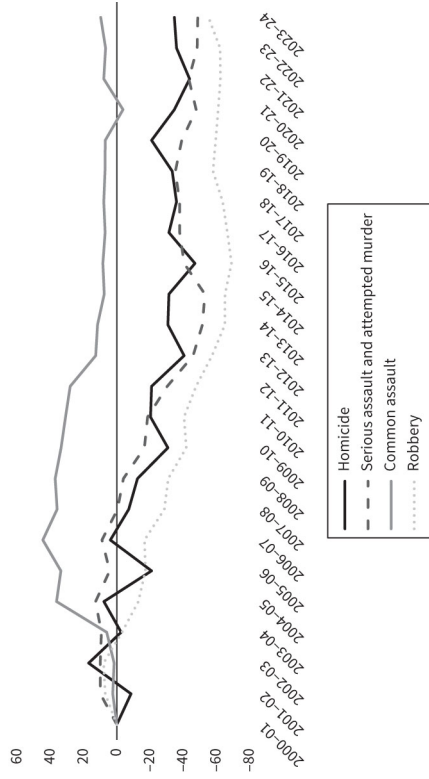
**Figure 5.1** Percentage change in the number of crimes of violence recorded in Scotland, by crime type, 2000/2001–2023/2024 (indexed at 2000/01)

*Source:* Authors own graph based on data extracted from Scottish Government Recorded Crime in Scotland bulletins.
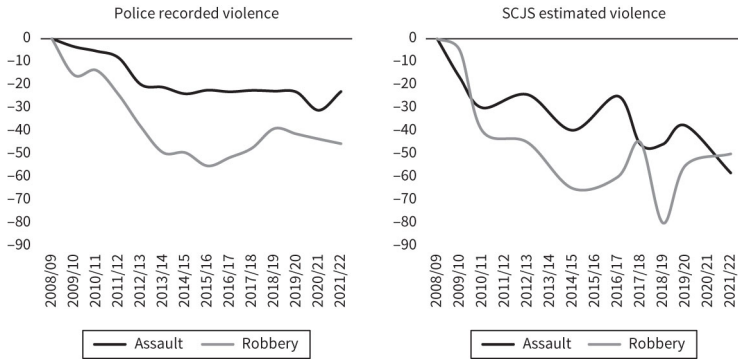
**Figure 5.2**  Percentage change in violent crime, by data source, 2008/09 to 2021/22 (indexed at 2008/09)

*Source*: Scottish Government (2023a) Recorded Crime in Scotland 2022/23 and earlier statistical bulletins. Scottish Government (2023b) Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2021/22: Main Findings.

*Note*: Comparable Scottish Crime and Justice Survey data are not available prior to 2008/2009 due to changes in the survey design.

(Fraser et al., 2024). In addition, for many years Glasgow had by far the highest homicide rate of comparable European cities; however, as shown in Figure 5.2, a 60% reduction in homicides in Glasgow between 2006 and 2014 brought it far more in line with its European neighbours. The reduction in London's homicide rate was lower than Glasgow, at 48% between 2004 and 2015. Notably, however, the overall homicide rate in Glasgow remained higher than London by the end of this period.

Violence is known to vary greatly across different geographies. Remarkably, however, localized trends in police recorded violence data suggest a consistent pattern of reduction in Glasgow.[3] Figure 5.3 shows the percentage change in the number of violent incidents recorded across six police subdivisions within the city between 2002 and 2019. Overall, violence reduced by between 30–50% across the city during this period; however, the degree and rate of decline during the period from 2011 and 2015 is highly consistent. A detailed study of violence trends in Scotland during this period demonstrated that incidents involving groups of young men

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[3]  Police recorded crime data were provided by Police Scotland for the years 2002 to 2019 under a Data Sharing Agreement. This included individual incidents of murder, attempted murder, serious assault, common assault, possession of a weapon or other offensive weapon, and robbery.
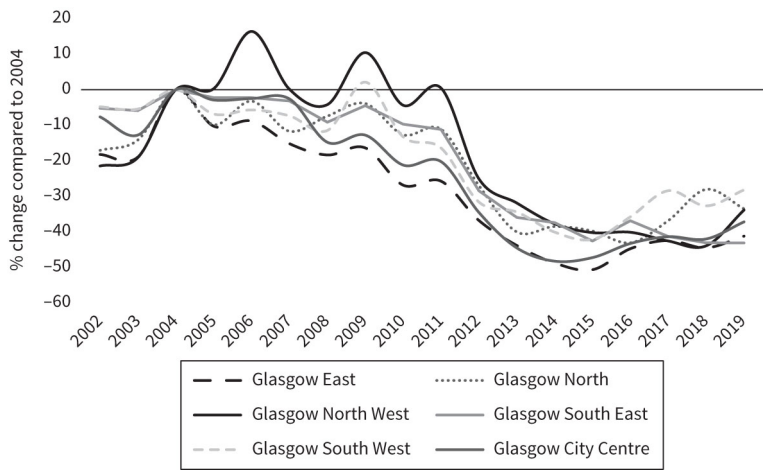
**Figure 5.3** Percentage change in the number of all violent crimes recorded in Glasgow police sub-divisions, 2002 to 2019 (indexed at 2004)
*Source*: Local level Police Recorded Crime data provided to the authors under a data sharing agreement.

using weapons in public places contributed to the greatest overall reduction to both homicide and other forms of violence (Skott, 2019).

  As discussed in chapter 2, in the case of New York, it was not just the scale of the change that was seen as significant but its achievement against a background of previous reputation for violence (Zimring, 2012; Davies, 2007). Glasgow's reputation as a 'No Mean City' of violence and territorial gangs was long-established, resulting in a powerful narrative of redemption and recovery. In the case of zero tolerance policing, quoting from Edelman (1971: 135), Newburn and Jones (2007: 237) described zero tolerance policing as a 'condensation symbol': a symbolic form that works to 'merge diverse anxieties and emotions with a shared expectation about the time, the place, and the action that will evoke common support and a common perception of an enemy'. The SVRU, and the 'public health approach' became, conversely, a condensation symbol of hope: not a folk devil (Cohen, 1972) but a folk hero.

  Generally speaking, the post-war increase in violence in Scotland was observed across most European countries, and most countries saw some degree of decline between the early 2000s and 2015. Importantly, too, Scotland's success in reducing violence is relatively short-lived when set against a much longer and more sustained backdrop of rising violence. As

discussed in chapter 4, from the early 1970s to the turn of the century, the number of (non-sexual) violent crimes recorded by the police in Scotland more than tripled. When considered over a longer time period, the magnitude of Scotland's violence reduction may seem more modest. Nonetheless, the *story* of violence reduction came to act as a 'more or less independent force' (Polletta, 2006: 5), prompting important discursive shifts in Scotland, and entering into the national and transnational policy field. As one journalist recalled, the SVRU 'changed not just the media narrative but also the narrative of politics to some extent... changed the way we talked about youth violence … [becoming] a kind of global news celebrity in a minor way' (Journalist 1, Scotland).

As we will see throughout this chapter, stories and storytelling were crucial in legitimating the development of a new language of public health approaches to violence reduction in Scotland. And reframing the existing public narrative around violence was doubtlessly offered credibility and legitimacy by the 'baffling success' (Turner, 2003: 14) of the data story of violence reduction. While the reduction may not in itself justify the international success story that resulted, it allowed narrative space for an alternative vision of policy-making that promoted public health principles over punitive approaches to violence. Indeed, following Petzke (2022), this statistical narrative offered an important basis of legitimacy for the growing movement around violence reduction. In the following sections, we discuss the role of media storytelling in promoting this narrative shift, drawing on interviews with journalists who reported on the 'beat' of crime and violence in Glasgow during this period.

## Media, narrative and, 'good news'

Against a backdrop of negative media publicity and stark statistics that had formed the basis of political fears about Scotland's violence problem, the VRU sought to take control of the narrative by inviting the media to report on the reality of violence. Journalists were invited out on patrols and provided access to coveted police intelligence which could be shared publicly, making it clear to those involved in violent offending that they were under observation. Working with The Evening Times (2006), the VRU set out to expose 'the gangs that shame Glasgow' by focusing on 2,000 identified 'gang' members who were thought to be regularly engaging in violence. While the veracity of these 'gang lists' have been questioned (Fraser and

Atkinson, 2014), the Evening Times printed a 'quick list of the city's best known gangs' accompanied with splashy images of gang violence in some of the most deprived areas of Glasgow. As a journalist working there at the time recalled:

> And they brought the VRU into the editorial offices of The Evening Times about, I would say, early 2006. And they came in and that's when those conversations started. And it was only after they started that we, if you like, 'cause this wasn't my idea ... I mean, obviously my job was to then plan the series, write the series and take leadership of it. But who decides that we're going to look at gang stuff? But you know, that was someone else and it was taken in conjunction with VRU. (Journalist 1, Scotland)

Rather than working behind the scenes, the VRU directors opened up about what was happening in communities across Glasgow and outlined the reality of violence. Importantly, messages were aimed just as much at those who were involved in the violence as a wider readership. Under the headline 'Glasgow's gangs top cop's plea for an end to violence', The Evening Times (2006) reported: 'almost every day gang violence breaks out on the streets of Glasgow. Here, Det Chief Supt John Carnochan, head of Strathclyde Police's Violence Reduction Unit gives his personal view of the problem and how it should be combated'. The newspaper would follow up the story later in the week with the answer: 'Zero tolerance isn't the only way to end gang violence. We also need to offer a way out ... Glasgow's gangs, police, council and school bosses join forces to fight territorialism - and offer the kids a way out'. (The Evening Times, 2006)

According to one of the VRU members at the time: 'we were constantly churning out stories, we would be constantly working with feature writers trying to change the narrative. We were trying to move away from "[if it] bleeds it leads"'. The VRU spoke publicly about the need to prioritize prevention and early years, infamously asking for more nurses or health visitors rather than police officers. As one journalist reflected:

> But in the history of stories about violence, one always stays in my mind which is when, you may remember, the SNP and the Labour Party were in a war of who would have the most cops....And John Carnochan said, "can we have 1,000 health visitors, please?" ... Detective Chief

Superintendent John Carnochan, with all his wonderful war stories about catching baddies. Him saying that was really important and changed not just the media narrative but also the narrative of politics to some extent. So that even when the SNP came up with 1,000 extra cops, which I'm sure secretly all the cops really liked and that's great and they would probably quite like another 1,000 now, but that changed the way we talked about youth violence for a couple of years then. (Journalist 1, Scotland)

The success of the narrative both nationally and internationally became so great that the VRU itself was imbued with a level of 'institutional charisma' (Bourdieu, 2017). As one journalist recalls: 'And so at some time that good news story became a global good news story. And I think there are a number of events in media and social media that made that happen and made the VRU a global good news story' (Journalist 1, Scotland). In particular, as we shall hear more in chapter 6, the newsworthiness of the VRU's approach prompted the story to travel south of the border, and then much further afield:

I'm pretty sure that some of the pieces that I did were followed up in London. And I feel like some of them as well were certainly followed up in America, but I mean that, in a way was sort of interesting because a lot of the things the VRU were looking at were based on models in America. . . . So, whether it was Canada or Scandinavia or whatever. So then, I suspect some of that was reflected back in the media, in those countries. But yeah, there was a sense that most of the things that they were talking about were based on models elsewhere. (Journalist 2, Scotland)

The evolution of the SVRU from a backroom in police headquarters to a 'global good news story' was, as we have argued, premised not only a data driven sense of legitimacy, but a sense of a clear moral narrative in which the plucky upstarts overcome the odds. Indeed, one participant went so far as to frame the success of the VRU media narrative in terms of its 'heroic' narratives: 'the Daily Record in particular. . . they said, but we need a hero. They wanted a hero cop . . . they wanted this sheriff coming over the horizon, you know. I'm going to sort the town' (Retired Senior Police Officer 3, Scotland). As discussed in chapter 4, stories and storytelling run deep in Scottish literature, and it is not unimportant that this underdog narrative marries well

with these deep stories of cultural identity. In the following section, we discuss the significance of the national story of egalitarianism, as well as the relative importance of Scotland's existence as a small nation in analysing the purchase of these stories.

## National narratives and basic plots

National narratives run deep in the social fabric of societies, creating a shared reservoir of collective identity. As cultural sociologists have argued, stories not only adhere to basic patterns but are often rooted in narratives of national identity (Alexander, 2003). The Scottish myth of national identity relates to stories of egalitarianism and underdog sensibilities, which aggressively and fervently fends off critique and ridicule. Writ large in the phrase, 'We're Aw Jock Tamsons' Bairns', or in Robert Burns' poem, *A Man's A Man for A That*, such mythologies represent a 'contemporary and active force providing, in most instances, a reservoir of legitimation for belief and action' (McCrone, 2001: 91), for example the enduring myth that there is 'no problem here' in relation to racism in Scotland (Davidson and Virdee, 2018). Significantly, narratives of communal decline and redemption play a central role in defining the agendas of nationalist movements (Levinger and Lytle, 2001) such as those for Scottish independence. At the same time, it is clear from the literary history of Scotland that a particular status is accorded to the folk hero. As Hobsbawm (1972) has detailed, the status of the 'outlaw' or 'bandit' has long been accorded international folk status, acting beyond the law rather than against it. In Scottish folklore, as in other contexts, outlaw figures such as William Wallace and Rob Roy occupy a deep cultural significance.

The 'deep story' of Scottish exceptionalism and egalitarianism, coupled with the status of the 'folk hero', we argue, formed an important context for the reception of the SVRU's storytelling. In the early 2000s, Scotland was in the grip of a national embarrassment stemming from damning international reports of epidemic rates of violent crime, and a clear sense from senior politicians and police that a radical change was required. The investment of the leaders of the SVRU with charismatic qualities, importantly, enabled connection not only with practitioners, but with politicians, civil servants, influential voices in civil society who came to form a growing chorus around the need for a narrative shift from individual to systemic violence. As one journalist put it:

> I think Scots are so aware that our, yes, our image and our self-image
> has been Shuggie Bain for such a long time, that there is, you know,
> there is always a real kind of desperate grasping for … yes, for some-
> thing different and so … it's perhaps not that the stories or those sorts
> of things aren't being reported but is it more about whether they are ac-
> tually being, how they are being digested by the public and how they are
> being respond … how the public are responding to them. (Journalist 2,
> Scotland)

As argued in chapter 4, one of the precursors of the symbolic reframing of
violence in Scotland was the leadership of key individuals with a 'split ha-
bitus', hybrid social actors whose roles allowed them to occupy a space in be-
tween fields. Like Berger's concept of 'elite dealers', this enabled the leaders
of this movement to act as 'bridge builders' (Berger, 2024: 18). Sandberg
and Fleetwood (2016) note that storytelling represents an important form
of currency in facilitating movement between fields, of stories retold and
reframed for different audiences.

The value placed on authentic stories of transformation and recovery
became a critical stimulus for the growing movement toward violence re-
duction in Scotland. Decision-making by civil servants and politicians,
typically driven by data and statistics, began to reflect the canonical import-
ance of the emerging narratives and give it greater credence as a driver for
shaping public policy. As one participant reflected:

> I think the power of stories … especially with something like violence
> and with young people and young lives …can be underestimated. The
> power of metaphors actually … kind of, negative metaphors that can eat
> away. You know, kind of, efforts to reduce violence, they are equally as
> important… nothing sells good papers like gory headlines. And some of
> the language is pretty lurid and it makes its way into the common … the,
> kind of, common consciousness. (Civil Servant 2, Scotland)

In what follows, we discuss two stories that illustrate the way the VRU
used storytelling to influence change across both policy and street
fields. This type of narratology, we would argue, enabled an interroga-
tion 'of fleeting counter-stories, emergent in everyday-life environments'
(Georgakopoulou, 2020). The stories we describe emanate from the reflec-
tions of participants working in the field of violence reduction in the early
2000s, drawing out significant and central elements that cut across their

accounts. The first is the tragedy of David's Story, a composite developed by the VRU to personify the need for a public health approach; and the second is the rebirth narrative which underwrote the VRU's efforts to engage directly with communities and individuals with experience of violence, specifically through the story of 'the Glasgow Boys'.

## Tragedy: David's Story

'David' is a pseudonym for a fifteen-year-old boy found guilty of culpable homicide in Glasgow, in the mid-1990s, and subsequently sentenced to seven years in prison. His story forms the basis of a case history formulated by Scotland's VRU in 2007. The Story had both an immediate and lasting impact, and formed a frequent reference point in interviews across all participant groups. Below, we make the case that the impact of this story was rooted in its adherence to a classical storytelling mode of tragedy. The Story begins with CCTV footage of the murder itself.

*Bathed in yellow streetlight, a grainy image of a city centre street sparks suddenly to life. The street is mayhem. Bodies shift quickly in and out of shot, at diagonals, throwing stretched punches. The focus is unsteady but six or seven people, all young men, are visible. A figure dressed in a blue tracksuit and white cap appears, cutting a zigzag path through the melee. He appears to throw one punch, then another, before turning to raise his hands in celebration. The knife that had been secreted in his hand is now visible, reflecting the glare of the streetlight. The second punch inflicted a stab-wound to the heart, that claimed the life of a passing stranger. The film cuts, and the story begins.*

The film acts as an introduction—or 'inciting incident'—for a presentation by members of the VRU, which follows David's Story from birth to the age of fifteen, when the murder took place. A stark timeline is presented. Born in 1981, David was rehoused three times in his first five years due to repeated incidents of domestic violence, moving between some of the most disadvantaged wards in Glasgow. His mother had addiction issues and struggled to care for him, and he spent weekdays with his grandmother. Between the ages of nine and twelve, David was rehoused a further three times due to poor living conditions and urban 'regeneration', often living with family members actively involved in crime. At age twelve he began to truant and was considered by the school to be 'outwith parental control'. He began to run with a local street gang, and received police attention for breaches of the peace, solvent abuse, assault, shoplifting and theft. In

the post-trial report the judge suggested that there was little indication 'in the background or supporting evidence suggesting that David is anything other than a pretty ordinary teenager ... [with] a decent and supportive family'. This suggests that professionals involved in his care had little understanding of the realities of his life and their potential impact. During his time in prison, David's mother died of a heroin overdose, and his sister was taken into secure care. The story ends as David is released from prison, rehoused on the same street as the prison, and becomes a father himself.[4]

The basic outline of David's Story was developed for a presentation to the Scottish Government in 2007, at a time when rates of violent crime in Scotland were at epidemic levels. The VRU combined police intelligence and other sources to compile a composite case history of David's life, and presented it as a narrative. Former Director of the VRU, John Carnochan recalls the initial invitation as follows:

> we want you to come along and speak. You've got fifteen minutes. So, we sat down, had a think about it and we thought, we need a narrative, we need a story. So, we had a piece of CCTV footage which was of a young ... a man being murdered by David. And we ... used that. . . . (SVRU Former Director 1, Scotland)

The CCTV footage is raw, shocking, and demands attention. As visual and narrative scholars have long recognized (Brown and Carrabine, 2017), narratives that are tethered to striking events and images 'endow events with the moral purpose, emotional telos, and engaging ambiguity that persuade others to participate' (Polletta, 2006: 35). Several interviewees were present during this initial presentation. According to these participants, the account held the audience spellbound. The fifteen minute session became an hour and a half long, with all other business cancelled. As one participant noted, it was 'brilliant, entertaining and shocking', and 'a pretty big deal' (Civil Servant 1, Scotland). Similarly, a former First Minister who was present recalls:

> The unusual thing in this case was specifically inviting somebody in who had a proposal and was basically asking us for political support, he wasn't just telling us what was happening ... he was basically coming in

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[4]  For a full account of David's life, see: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/dec/19/glasgow-gang-violence-david-story [accessed 10 June 2025].

> to say, "I'm going to show you how serious this is and I'm going to tell you how I think we can deal with it and I'm here to ask for your support", and [it was] incredibly powerful, incredibly powerful. (Politician 2, Scotland)

A tragedy, at its most basic, involves an unfavorable ending for the main character. This may be the result of an internal flaw or a bad decision, but it always ends in disaster (Hart, 2011). In Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, for example, from the outset the audience is made aware of its fateful conclusion, before tracing the journey that led to that ineluctable outcome. Crucially, however, the flaw revealed by the story is not with the protagonist but the society that failed them. In its piece-by-piece account of warning signs missed, it shifts the spotlights from the deed itself to the systematic failures that led up to it. It was clear to the members of the VRU responsible that they had struck upon something extraordinarily powerful, recalling:

> At the end of it, there was that thing of I looked round the room and it was deathly silent, utterly deathly silent . . . oh my god this is really resonating in this room, really, really utterly resonated in this room. I was totally and utterly dumbstruck because nobody's seen anything like this before in terms of what we're talking about. (SVRU Former Director 3, Scotland)

David's Story, over the course of the following years became a staple of the VRU's public communications, delivered to wide-ranging audiences both internationally and locally. A former Director of the SVRU recalled that although it 'is difficult to quantify exactly how many times we have told the story or how many people have seen it . . . I reckon that it is tens of thousands' (Carnochan, 2015: 59). Certainly, interviewees from across a wide range of backgrounds—from education to health, early years to youth work—made direct reference to the story. The emotional impact of the narrative left an affective imprint that sustained over time. As one interviewee recalls:

> So, I think that was a really powerful piece and I think. . . David's Story in the early years framework was, I mean, you know, I remember when I first met John Carnochan at an early years conference I was like, why is there a police officer? And then when he got up and spoke I was like, "oh, my god, yeah". (Civil Servant 1, Scotland)

Analysts of storytelling have long argued that narrative commands attention in a uniquely compelling way (Hart, 2011). For interview participants,

the VRU storytelling delivered a clarity and power of message. Notably, the message conveyed by David's Story involved a shift from a traditional justice narrative around individual responsibility to that of a systemic failure. At a time when Antisocial Behaviour Orders for youth offending and other forms of individual responsibilization were to the fore in both devolved and Westminster politics (Garland, 2001; McVie, 2011), the emphasis on societal shortcomings represented a radical shift in focus. Without explicitly stating it, by subverting standard accounts, the presentation exposes how ill-considered actions on the individual scale can have fatal, if unintended, consequences. As one participant commented:

> It just highlighted . . . without actually saying to a social work or a department, you could have done better, without actually saying to a police officer, you could have done better, or a teacher, you could have done better, or housing, you could have done better. It just says, look here's a story. This happened, this is real. (SVRU Former Director 3, Scotland)

As cultural sociologists and narrative criminologists have long realized, the story form carries a depth of emotional resonance that has the potential to radically alter action. As Fleetwood et al. (2019: 1) note, 'stories shape our social world; they inspire us to do or resist harms. With careful and close attention, they can tell us a great deal'. David's Story is an instance of what have been called 'small stories' (Lorimer, 2003): personal narratives that strike a chord with a larger public narrative and carry on their wings the seeds of social change. As Sandberg and Fondevila (2022: 226) note, '[s]tories instigate actions'. Yet, as recent contributions to victimology (Walklate et al., 2019) have demonstrated, the story form can also be limiting, and there is clear significance in the VRU's shift from tragic narratives to those of redemption and rebirth. The example of David's Story suggests the need to pay attention to the role of storylines more broadly, as well as storytelling authority and who has the power to speak (Annison and Condry, 2022; Mackenzie et al., 2023).

    The story created an imperative to act and prevent similar tragedies from occurring. Participants recalled being able to see themselves in the narrative—as teachers, social workers, or early years workers—and related the narrative to missed opportunities for intervention in David's life. As will be discussed later in the chapter, narratives that 'stop' at tragedy can be fatalistic and prevent action (Polletta, 2009). Over time the story told by the VRU evolved into a different arc, which echoed the 'deep story' of Scottish

social mobility, the 'lad o pairts' story of social movement (McCrone, 2001) which accords with Booker's (2004) 'basic plot' of rebirth. We tell this story through one of the lesser-known tales from the VRU storybook: a tale of two tattoos.

## Rebirth: The Glasgow Boys

One of Booker's 'basic plots' is 'rebirth', in which 'a hero or heroine falls under a dark spell which eventually traps them … they languish … [t]hen a miraculous act … takes place' (Booker, 2004: 195). Classical examples include *Sleeping Beauty*, or Dicken's, *A Christmas Carol*—or in popular culture the story arc of Darth Vader in the original Star Wars trilogy. The narrative of the Glasgow miracle, like the New York miracle which came before (Zimring, 2012), exemplifies this narrative or rebirth. Here Glasgow, sleepwalking as a violent city, undergoes a miraculous act and suddenly awakes to a new global reputation, leading to a happy ending. As one participant reflects of the early influence of the VRU:

> The real effect in my opinion … was to change how governments think. It was to change the narrative over the offender. To change the narrative of the victims. To change how we think we should be spending our money and how we should be looking at young people. And how we should treat young people with knives….That was the real success and that's what's led to some of the reductions. (SVRU Former Director 3, Scotland)

This national narrative, we argue, was enabled by the practical decision within the VRU, and other key organizations, to platform and promote the voices of lived experience. The development of social enterprises such as Street & Arrow and Braveheart Industries, based on the renowned 'Homeboy Industries' in the United States, represented an important shift in which justice-experienced individuals became skilled entrepreneurs. This approach was also echoed by the retelling and legitimation of such stories by stakeholders engaged in street level prevention work across health, education, police, social work and a wide range of third sector organizations. Moreover, storytelling became a mainstay of other violence-focused initiatives, including Medics Against Violence (MAV), No Knives Better Lives (NKBL), and Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) which all, in various different ways, developed educational programmes founded on real-life examples. This was not a cynical tactic but the effect of a moral commitment

to listening to, and taking seriously, the lived experience of those involved in both violence and violence prevention at the street level. The authenticity and value placed on these personal narratives meant, in turn, that these stories being translated into relatable, compelling narratives at the policy level. However, the stories that were told within the policy field, by individuals who developed competency as 'plural actors' between policy and street, represented only a handful of those the VRU supported.

The story of the Glasgow Boys—and the tale of two tattoos—is a case in point. The Edinburgh Tattoo is a world-famous bagpipe parade, set against the backdrop of Edinburgh's historic castle. The story begins with an individual who, after a long career in the army with intermittent efforts to engage with young men in conflict with the law, had become executive of The Tattoo. He had met with the SVRU some years before and done some work in Polmont, and had the idea of bringing young men on SVRU programmes to work as part of the festival. As he said:

> And that was called the Glasgow Boys. And the reason I went for that is because it sounded like a gang but it also resonated with the Scottish colourists, the painters, from the turn of the century, who were just extraordinary … painting is all about light. It's all about the use of light and how light is received by objects, how it's reflected by objects, how shadow and light are reflected onto it by other things. And my dream was that the colours that the colourists were offering was part of this story.

> They were amazing young people. Lots of them had got real, serious issues. I mean, real … you know, some of them had gone to jail for some very serious crimes and were tough people, uncompromising. Lots had the 1,000-metre stare… so being taught to call people sir and madam and stand up when they come into the room and to dress smartly every morning and go for a run and to stand still when you've been told to stand still and all those sorts of things. . . . And they responded incredibly well to it.

This senior army officer took his lifelong experience of working with men in what he called 'a 400 lump … a thoroughly well-organized gang' and used it to create opportunities for young men to turn their experiences on the street to an alternative purpose. It was an intense, month-long experience but many thrived on it. Though this wasn't the work of the VRU exactly, it fitted neatly with the model of employment and positive transformations they were advocating for through Street & Arrow, and the work put in by

numerous other local charities, community organizations, and professional groups. These were tangible ways that enabled young people to tell different stories about their lives.

The second tattoo was on the face of a young man who participated in the programme, one of the few who ended up joining the army after the experience. Another interviewee told us his story:

> That wee guy had a thirty six-month sentence in Polmont … he used substances to forget his life, and he used to say that he would wake up either in a police cell or a hospital or in somebody's house or in a back alley thinking, what have I done now? Couldn't remember, he'd drunk so much.
>
> Anyway, so he said, I want to join the army, so I got him into a wee job in a gym, started running with him, he was following a recruitment assessment guide to get fit … then he said, "listen, I'm ready, I want to join." I bought him a wee shirt and tie, he was feeling really good about himself… [then] this military sergeant guy… straightaway he looked at him and he said, "listen, wee man, go and get that tattoo removed from your face first and then come back and see me, because you're not allowed facial tattoos."
>
> So, we walked away, I'm thinking… how's he going to take this, because normally a setback like that … ended in chaos… and he turned to me as he's walking to the door, he says, "what do you think?" I says, "well, I think it's just a hurdle." He says, "will you help me jump it?" "It's a good question," I says, "my answer's aye, we'll jump this." (SVRU Former Member 2, Scotland)

The first hurdle was cleared with the support of specialist maxillofacial surgeons who were able to perform a skin graft to cover the tattoo. Even without the tattoo, though, the mark of a criminal record could not be covered over easily. Eventually with the support of VRU staff this hurdle was also overcome and the young man passed the tests with flying colours.

> He… signed up for the Black Watch… within four years, that boy was a lance corporal. He's now married, two kids, his own house, his life is completely transformed. He's an absolute star, and every day, I think to myself, you know, he's done this. We've been privileged to go on that

journey with him… he has been able to become the guy he's always meant to be. (SVRU Former Member 2, Scotland)

Stories are important. The Tattoo allowed young men who had often been excluded to tell a different story to themselves and those closest to them. And seeing themselves as others saw them was part of that. This change of the narrative was rooted not only in the power, performance and pathos of the story itself, but also in the audience. Such a story of rebirth was one that allowed audiences to replace feelings of shame over Glasgow's violent reputation with those of national pride, as stories of 'revolution, foes vanquished, and threats averted strengthen national identity by stimulating emotions of fear, pride, longing replaced by determination, and grief replaced with joy' (Polletta, 2006: 12).

In subsequent years the VRU began to employ people with convictions, whose personal stories of change became a staple of the VRU's public profile. Rebirth narratives typically detail how an event forces the main character to change their ways and often become a better individual. Through their position in the field, the VRU could powerfully tell 'the stories of young people … [who] don't have a voice, traditionally… but quite often they were real people. And that made all of a difference' (Journalist 1, Scotland). A number of participants recalled the VRU, 'looking to get alongside young people in deprived communities', using their position as a conduit to ensure to some extent, 'people who were actually facing these issues in their lives and their communities, were, to some extent, involved in developing and creating policy and practice solutions' (Policy Professional, Scotland). What is significant in stories of rebirth is that the change in the central character must be recognized in the eyes of others to be genuine. In addition to telling stories of personal growth and change, the VRU provided practical opportunities such as Street & Arrow.

So I think it's a good example of where you've got kind of that, you've got lived experience incorporated, to some extent. You've got different professions bringing ideas in. You've got people that were sort of working in practice, like the police, the VRU, are a good example, them bringing ideas to academia. Academics coming from a place of practice, knowledge as well, so you've kind of got a good blend. And I think that is part of the reason then, why you've got a kind of different approach, and different way of thinking, and different ideas, and something a bit kind

of . . . yeah, a new way of thinking about it. So not just a policy initiative, a completely different kind of approach. (Academic 1, Scotland).

Stories told in a certain way can persuade audiences of the need for change. Effectively the VRU created and held a shared space between policy, policing, the street and the media where the same set of stories reverberated. And, perhaps more importantly still, it opened a 'thick boundary zone' (Arrigoni, 2022) in which a new set of 'plural actors' formed an alliance and agitated for change.

As we have argued in this section, storytelling represented a crucial element in building the foundations for a movement in violence reduction. Unlike Petzke's formulation of a return to 'canonical sources', however, in this chapter we have argued that tapping into the 'deep story' of Scottish nationalism—buttressed by the charismatic power of numbers (Engle Merry, 2016)—offered a comparable legitimizing force. However, as narrative scholars have long recognized, stories always leave something in the margins and we must look not only at the stories we tell but also what they mask. In the final section, we turn to the 'stories untold' within the success story of violence reduction in Scotland.

## Beyond success stories

'The Stories We Tell' is the title of a documentary film by the Canadian filmmaker Sarah Polley. A nostalgic film combining grainy reels of the filmmaker's childhood with interviews with her family, it delivers an absolute knock-out punch. The story begins with a well-known story in the family—the kind of thing that gets repeated so often that it loses meaning. But she started pulling the thread and it leads her to a lie in her family history. In looking squarely at the story that went untold, she uncovered a bigger, deeper story. Stories always leave something in the margins and we must look not only at the stories we tell but also what they mask.

As this chapter has highlighted, the success story of the SVRU is one that has made a considerable impact on policy debate, the national and international media, and popular culture. For journalists interviewed, the telling of a 'very strong and compelling narrative [about] the VRU in Glasgow and how it came about and how it succeeded' (Journalist 2, Scotland) came to form a regular feature on the national and international media landscape, allowing the VRU to 'set a political agenda through the newspapers'

(Journalist 1, Scotland). As we will go on to see in chapter 6, this led to pilgrimages of senior leaders in England and Wales, and the movement of stories from Scotland to England and Wales, which in turn led to a 'growing chorus' of advocates and, crucially, a series of others that created new bridges and stories that followed the original mould. In this chapter, we have argued that part of the reason for this success was its storied character which, alongside a wide-ranging series of shifts that criss-crossed policy and street fields, resulted in a movement in violence reduction that shifted the dial in public debate on violence. One participant, for example, reflected on how perceptions of violence in the city had dramatically shifted from the most negative views to far more sympathetic responses:

> So where to start? I think it's changed. I think it's become less sensationalist and aggressive as the scene of violence has changed over ten years. So particularly in say Glasgow and the west coast, it used to be the murder capital of Europe or whatever. It used to be horrific gang attacks and horrific maiming, scarring. . . . But now I don't think you see that as often in the news, in the press. I think people have started to have more of an understanding of the drivers of violence. There's a little bit more . . . not compassion towards violence, but I think an understanding of where some stuff comes from, instead of just pointing fingers at whole areas. (National Charity Manager 1, Scotland)

However, stories are powerful because they are selective. Storytelling, particularly where personal insights and lived experience is shared, is neither unproblematic nor apolitical. For example, over the period that serious violence was falling, common assaults rose substantially. In 2004/2005, the number of recorded incidents increased by 29% compared to the previous year, which explains the sharp increase in the overall violence trend.[5] The number of common assaults started to fall after 2006/2007, albeit the extent of the reduction was far smaller than for the other three violence categories. Overall, the number of incidents of common assault recorded during this

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[5]  It has been proposed that this substantial rise in common assault was explained to a large extent by the introduction of new Scottish Crime Recording Standards (SCRS) in 2004, which had the 'aim of providing a more victim oriented approach to the recording of crime and ensuring uniformity in crime recording standards across Scotland' (Police Scotland, 2021). However, lack of comparable data means it was not possible to determine the extent to which this increase was due to more police recording of incidents under the SCRS as opposed to a real increase in minor crimes of violence (Scottish Executive, 2006).

period remained above the 2000/2001 level. From a violence reduction perspective, therefore, the main story in Scotland is one of significant declines in serious violence, but not all violence. Further, one of the few interventions to receive evaluation, CIRV, found that there was no significant reduction in participants' involvement in serious violence, although there was some evidence that participants showed a reduction in weapon carrying (Williams et al., 2014).

The data story around a sustained reduction in serious violent crime, including homicide, has formed the backbone for the good news stories in Scotland, and offered a degree of credibility and legitimacy to the claims made by various actors, including the VRU, about what had caused this momentous change. Yet Scotland's violence problem has not gone away; common assault, which makes up by far the bulk of all violence, has remained persistently high. Some participants were particularly sceptical of the 'success story' of the SVRU and particularly that of any perceived 'miracle'—with many looking to the evidence beyond the story to refute claims of success. Several participants alluded to aspects of tension and contradiction in the reality of the practice of violence reduction at the time. Participants were keen to caution against resting on the easy narrative of cause and effect for violence reduction. As one participant put it:

> I don't think you can put it at the door of any one thing. This is just my opinion obviously 'cause I don't have the evidence for it. But I think at the time, so many people were doing so many things that some of that must have had an impact. So, if you look across, for example, all the work that was going on in schools, there was ourselves, there was No Knives Better Lives, there was MVP. I think the CIRV thing was good for the gangs in the east end of Glasgow... but it certainly didn't help the rest of Scotland. Violence went down across the piece as far as I can see; it wasn't just in Glasgow. I think it's very hard to land it at the door of any one organization. The VRU were certainly influential, but I don't know that you could say that they influenced everything that happened. (National Charity Manager 1, Scotland)

Similarly, one civil servant stated, there is 'a real danger that we mythologize, valorize, the VRU as a kind of untouchable thing'. Another noted that the SVRU were 'a small cog in a big, big wheel' and that both complementary shifts and broader societal changes were also at play. Focusing in on

one of the VRU's flagship policies, one participant noted that the impact was temporary and geographically specific:

> The CIRV project had an impact in the East End. It stopped after three years, the violence didn't go away, gangs did not go away, we did not solve Glasgow's gang problem. Some have operated in a small area. But if you lived in Pollock, or Castlemilk, or Drumchapel, gangs existed there, they were not impacted on by the VRU or by CIRV. (Academic 3, Scotland)

As recent scholarship has demonstrated (Annison and Condry, 2022; Mackenzie et al., 2023), stories that are hidden from public view reflect deep-seated norms pertaining to storytelling authority and who has the power to speak. For David's Story in particular, the ethics around consent and the legacy of that intelligence, regardless of impact, is paramount. Put plainly, David never gave permission for his story to be told. The platforming of individuals with lived experience of crime in policy circles has recently been called into question by rapper and social commentator Darren McGarvey—once rapper-in-residence at the SVRU—for its focus on extractive emotional nature, terming the practice a 'trauma-industrial-complex' (McGarvey, 2025). Similarly, Sarah Anderson has recently drawn attention to the shortcomings in the policy shift toward trauma and 'Adverse Childhood Experiences' (ACEs) which formed an important undercurrent to the movement toward violence reduction (Anderson, 2024).

As participants described, violence against women and girls, and repeat violence and victimization, seldom featured in the public narrative of violence and violence reduction (Strid, Walby, and Armstrong, 2013). Recent studies have suggested that repeat violence and victimiszation is an 'overlapping and co-constituted… a dynamic process, wherein diverse forms of violence inform, transform and amplify one another' (Batchelor and Gormley, 2023: 13). As we learned from community participants, these issues were writ large in their experiences with young people. As one youth worker noted, 'the mental health of young people is one of the biggest issues we have seen over the last few years, as well as the sexual violence against young women' (Community Leader 2, Glasgow). Another participant added, 'I think, to some extent, like you've got to be cautious about this, because there's all kind of hidden violence, domestic violence, which is clearly, a major issue, and that is continuous. But the acceptance of violence, I think, has changed in society in Scotland' (Academic 1, Scotland). Finally,

and as will be discussed in more detail in chapter 8, community participants noted the changing nature of violence including changes in youth culture, advances in technology and the ongoing impact of lockdown on the mental well-being of young people, in particular raising concerns about increasing rates and levels of violence towards self. As we will argue, there is a danger of relying on past narratives of success over the need for attention to the emergent dynamics of violence involving young people.

## Conclusion

As has been argued, narratives and storytelling have been central to the reconstruction of the city of Glasgow away from its traditional representation as a 'violent city', and its subsequent presentation as a success story in violence reduction. Through narrative analysis of the two prominent stories within the public health movement—the tragedy of David's Story, and the redemptive arc of The Glasgow Boys—we have made the case that storytelling and narrative were central to the reframing of violence in Scotland, in a way that mirrored a shift in Scottish political rhetoric towards a more compassionate era of justice (McAra and McVie, 2013), contributing to 'whole-system, cultural and organizational change' (Youth Violence Commission, 2018: 6) that found a ready audience in the midst of debates over Scottish independence. As cultural sociologists and narrative criminologists have long realized, the story form carries a depth of emotional resonance that has the potential to radically alter action. As Fleetwood et al. (2019: 1) note, 'stories shape our social world; they inspire us to do or resist harms. With careful and close attention, they can tell us a great deal'. Yet, as recent contributions to victimology (Walklate et al., 2019) have demonstrated, the story form can also be limiting, and there is clear significance in the VRU's shift from tragic narratives to those of redemption and rebirth. David's Story is an instance of what have been called 'small stories' (Lorimer, 2003): personal narratives that strike a chord with a larger public narrative and carry on their wings the seeds of social change. Approaching David's Story, and the wider story of the VRU, through the lens of tragedy, redemption and rebirth, demonstrates the effect that such story arcs can carry.

Though storytelling, data, and narrative represent a different form of authority than the 'canonical sources' referred to by Petzke (2022), in this chapter we argued that—in the context of Scotland—these sources of legitimacy have particular purchase. Flowing from the 'deep story' of Scottish

exceptionalism, combined with the relative density of social networks within the policy field, the 'success story' of violence reduction itself became a source of legitimacy. As noted, the success story of the VRU contributed to the founding of further VRUs, first in London then across England and Wales. The evidence presented here suggests that the successful shift in narrative in Scotland was facilitated by a set of structural and agentic conditions that may be difficult to replicate wholesale. This, perhaps, is one explanation of why evidence of successful violence reduction in the new VRUs has been mixed at best (Home Office, 2023). As has been argued, the narrative of hope and redemption personified by the VRU struck a chord with both the 'deep story' of egalitarianism in Scotland, and the historical moment of an independence referendum, conditions that are unlikely to reoccur in other contexts. Rather than approaching any transfer of the 'Glasgow model' as an instance of straightforward policy transfer, therefore, we suggest that the process may be better understood as one of policy mobility, exploring the 'heterogeneous networks of innovators, emulators, adaptors, and circulators ... probing their frayed edges as well as their centers of authority' (Peck and Theodore, 2012: 28). In the following chapters, we explore the divergent evolution of the public health model in England and Wales.

# MA PAIN MA LIFE

One day you started telling us about your lives. Remember that day when we had an illustrator come and draw pictures while you told stories? Standing there with a big flipchart and pens, scribbling away while you were all talking about getting mad with it and taking yourself to Seshlehem or whatever. The story of how you met, one of you coming into the school rocking full white Air Force Ones instead of black school shoes. You said it was filth which meant good. The picture she drew of that is a classic.

You talked honestly that day. About going on Snapchat and giving out abuse to other schemes, like we're gonnie chop ye, stab ye, kill ye. You said it was frightening but in a resigned way like that's just the way it is. But you also talked about your friendships and loyalty, and sticking together. About the time you got flanked by about twenty boys, like something out of Call of Duty. But you stood your ground and had each others backs.

We introduced you to all kind of people. I don't know if you remember but I'll never forget that time our mate Luke was up visiting from London and came in. You were expecting someone like Stormzy and up rocks a pale skinny ginger guy, he looked more Scottish than any of you. He told me after he was dead nervous, this was your school, your thing. But doing keepy-uppies in the classroom broke the ice, he was actually really good.

And you were interested in London; you'd seen Top Boy and the rap video the group there had made. So, you listened. There was a lot of chat about different slang, not filth but shanks and ends, calling each other fam, but there was a lot that was shared. He told me he remembers laughing a lot and shaking all your hands, one of you with a cheeky grin, another with your hood up. I don't know if it was connected but after that we started talking about telling your stories by writing a rap like the group in London. Not trying on London accents but in your own voices, telling your own story.

Recording that rap must have been one of my all-time favourite things we did. I remember the first week none of you showed up and I was raging with you. Like we'd gone to all this effort, and you couldn't be bothered. You stepped up after that and the next week couldn't have been more different.

You were respectful, leaving space for each other, riffing off each other's words to write a story that was bigger than any one of you. It starts we're the wise men, this is our story, and it's true. There's a nice beat with a high vocal behind it, catchy, and you took it in turns to perform different takes on the lines. The stories the same from scheme to scheme, young teams fighting instead of chasing a dream. Fighting for ma life, trying not to carry a knife. But I was brought up with violence in ma life.

# 6
# Policy Divergence

## Introduction

Scotland and England are—like England and America—two nations separated by a common language. While the two nations are geographically proximate, they have clear points of historical, social, and political divergence (Muncie, 2011; Goldson, 2014). As discussed in chapter 2, in addition to long-standing differences in their systems of law and public administration, the devolution of power to the Holyrood Parliament in 1999 added further complexity to the levers of power and governance that separate the two nations. Importantly, the patterns of policy learning and networks in the countries are also distinct. While Scottish policymakers often look to the Nordic or Celtic nations, embodying welfare led social policy in small nation contexts, civil servants in Westminster more commonly draw on policy networks in the United States (Cairney and St Denny, 2020). Where policy movement occurs between the nations, historically this has taken place in a south-north direction, as opposed to the other way round. The movement of the public health approach from Scotland to England would, then, appear to present an interestingly contrary case.

   In chapters 6 and 7, we travel south to 'follow the policy' (Peck and Theodore, 2012) as it moves from the nested 'territorial policy field' (Cairney and St Denny, 2020) of Scotland, tracing its isomorphic path as it is exposed to the adversarial, multiscalar policy fields of national and regional government in England. This chapter is structured as follows: first, we consider recurrent perceptions of crisis concerning England's youth (Pearson, 1983), before examining recent data on violence trends in England. Next, we mirror the approach taken in chapter 4 by applying the concept of symbolic revolution to recent policy change in England. We begin by exploring

two periods of crisis that created space for policy change: the first prompted by the 2011 English riots, and the second by sharply rising rates of violence between 2015–2018. Next, we turn our attention to the reconciliation of existing discursive binaries. In our case, we consider whether four recent violence reduction policy initiatives—which emerged at both national and regional scales between 2014–2023—constituted this type of change. The four policy initiatives we consider are:

(1)  the Shield initiative in London;
(2)  the establishment of regional Violence Reduction Units (VRUs);
(3)  the Youth Endowment Fund (a £200m 'what works' centre for violence reduction established by the Home Office in 2019); and
(4)  the statutory 'Serious Violence Duty'.

Finally, the chapter turns to the issue of leadership and the individuals responsible for driving these policy initiatives. We argue that the main advocates for three of the four initiatives were people or groups who were situated squarely within a single policy field. In contrast, one of the policy initiatives—regional VRUs—was driven by the cross-party Youth Violence Commission (YVC), which comprised multiple actors who, taken together, harnessed some of the generative potential associated with the 'space between fields' (Eyal, 2013). This served to carve space for a reframing of the debate about violence along the lines of that which had taken place in Scotland. However, as we will come to see in chapter 7, attempts to emulate the discursive change in Scotland were hampered by the predominance of a specific form of canonized knowledge in policy-making in England, namely, the 'cold charisma' (Mau, 2019) of evaluative statistical knowledge. At both national and regional scales, English policymakers display a 'preoccupation with quantification, measurement and objective evidence as the foundation of political authority' (Esmark, 2020: 173). This, we will argue, had a significant bearing on the way in which the public health approach was translated from rhetoric into practice in England.

## Crisis conditions

As Pearson (1983) has argued, each generation—from at least the 1600s onwards—has demonstrated concerns over a perceived decline in morality amongst England's youth, and called for a return to a perceived Golden

Age of moral turpitude. To give one example, Pearson quotes the British Medical Journal in 1829: 'children who have been brought up within these thirty years, have nothing like the same reverence and submission to their parents … this is the cause of juvenile depredation: this is a chief cause of the increase in crime, especially among children … the domestication of man's wild spirit is gone' (Irving, 1829; quoted in Pearson, 2011: 29–30). In *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al., 1978), Hall and colleagues present an analysis of the recurrent 'folk devil' of racialized youth in England (Jefferson, 2008). More recently, the cyclical nature of concerns over youth culture has become focused on violence and territorial 'gangs' (Fraser, 2015). As described by the anthropologist Dwight Conquergood (1996), the gang has become a 'master symbol for excluded Others … an all purpose devil figure onto which we project our deepest fears about social disorder and demographic change'.

Notably, as part of the recurrence of concerns over youthful disorder, violence features prominently as a supposed marker of more generalized moral decline among a nation's youth. Violence therefore constitutes a symbolic representation of broader social tensions, but also a concrete instance of harm that prompts potential policy responses that may at times be disproportionate to the scale of the problem or poorly connected to its causes (Downes and Newburn, 2022).

Following a similar trend to Scotland, from the 1960s onwards, homicide rates in England and Wales increased from around 0.6 per 100,000 in 1961 to 1.69 in 2003 (Eisner, 2008). Other types of violence, such as serious wounding and acts endangering life, also rose throughout the latter decades of the twentieth century (Home Office, 2012). Again, mirroring trends in Scotland, from 2003 this upward trend reversed, and the period until 2014, at least as measured by the Crime Survey for England and Wales, brought a sustained and significant decline in various types of violence across the country. Homicides fell by 39%, from a high of 853 in 2003 to 520 in 2014 (House of Commons Library, 2023). Hospital data in England showed assault with a sharp object falling 30%, from 5,226 finished consultant episodes in 2004/2005 to 3,643 in 2014/2015 (NHS Digital, 2021).

Similar trends can be observed in relation to London, albeit the decline in violence appeared more pronounced. Over the same period, homicides in London fell from 216 to ninety five (MPS, 2021). Figure 6.1 shows the rate of recorded violence (all types) per capita for London, as a whole between 2002 and 2019. Following a similar pattern to Glasgow, the trend was stable between 2002 and 2005, followed by a sustained drop until 2013.
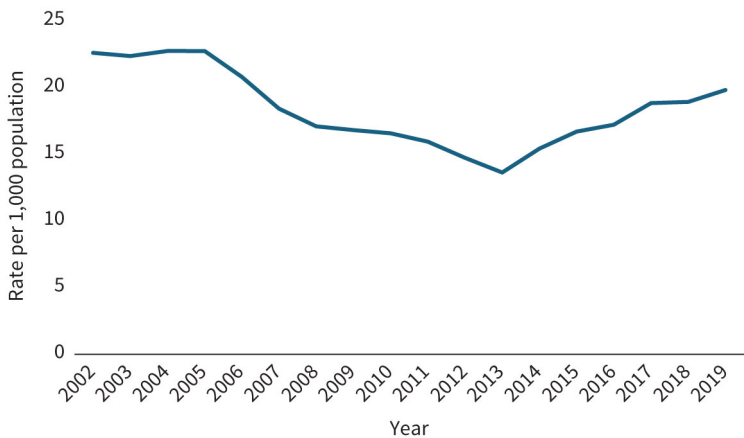
**Figure 6.1**  Rate of violence in London, 2002 to 2019

*Source*: Local level Police Recorded Crime data provided to the authors under a data sharing agreement.

Unlike in Glasgow, however, rates of violence rate then increased steadily between 2013 and 2019. Despite this increase, the rate of violence across London was around 12% lower in 2019 than it had been in 2002.

These declines in violence in England have been examined extensively in the academic literature (see, for example, Miles and Buehler, 2020), and they broadly mirror those of other countries across Europe, including Scotland. However, in accordance with studies that show a significant 'negativity bias' in the media (Lengauer et al., 2012), these trends in violence reduction became overshadowed by a perceived crisis triggered by England's 'summer of violent disorder' in 2011 (The Guardian and LSE, 2012).

## Catalysing events

As Petzke (2022: 498) has noted, 'symbolic revolutions generally occur where agents with [a split habitus] encounter fields that have been disrupted by crises'. By indicating that something is broken or lacking, periods of crisis have the potential to disrupt the status quo and open up space for the mobilization of new 'prophets', from within or outside the existing systems. The importance of perceived crisis in driving change has been recognized by other scholars interested in policy-making, including Kingdon

(1984), who posited that items on the policy-making agenda are dictated by the convergence of three separate 'streams': problems (or crises), solutions, and politics. Drawing on Kingdon's work, Mucciaroni (1992: 460) argued that the potential for change is created when a 'crisis or "focusing event" attracts attention to' a social problem.

In recent years, two such crises have occurred in the context of serious violence in England. The first was in August 2011, when a number of major English cities were stunned by a series of riots. Triggered by the police shooting of Mark Duggan in Tottenham, London, the 2011 English riots represented the most significant outbreak of collective violence in the post-war period (Guardian and LSE, 2012). What began as peaceful protests against the police shooting specifically, and perceived racist over-policing more generally, soon turned violent. Local shops were looted by rioters, and buildings and vehicles were set on fire. The riots quickly spread beyond Tottenham to other areas of London, including Enfield, Brixton, Dalston, Denmark Hill, Islington and Woolwich. From 8 –11 August 2011, rioting also broke out in other cities across England, including Birmingham, Bristol, Liverpool, Manchester and Nottingham.

Much of the mainstream media, and the overwhelming majority of politicians, were keen to frame the rioters as mindless thugs involved in organized criminal gangs (Reicher and Stott, 2011; Treadwell et al., 2013). It transpired, however, that many of those involved in the riots had nothing to do with gangs, and that their motivations ranged from a sense of social injustice linked to austerity and discriminatory policing to opportunistic consumerism (Treadwell et al., 2013; Akram, 2014; Newburn et al., 2018). While the question concerning the motivations of rioters is contested, the political implications of the 2011 English riots were more clear-cut. In the immediate aftermath, Prime Minister David Cameron swiftly announced moves to 'tackle gang culture' (Wintour, 2011: np), and declared 'concerted, all-out war on gangs and gang culture… a major criminal disease that has infected streets and estates across our country'.

Overlooking the general trend of declining rates of violence, these statements marked a significant shift in policy rhetoric, which resonated strongly with earlier racialized constructions of the 'mugging' crisis (Hall et al., 1978). As scholars have pointed out, an enforcement focus on so-called 'gang activity' has historically involved the police identifying and criminalizing groups of young, working class people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (Williams and Clarke, 2018). This process was concretized by a cross-government report published in November 2011,

entitled *Ending Gang and Youth Violence* (Home Office, 2011). Among
other things, the report promoted the use of 'gang injunctions' for young
people aged 14–17 years old and showcased the work of local 'gang action
groups'—specialized teams made up of professionals from policing, pro-
bation, youth offending, housing, children's services, schools and commu-
nity representatives—in tackling gang and youth violence. It is important
to note that while the 2011 riots took place in numerous English cities,
Scotland avoided similar levels of violence and disorder. This contributed
to perceptions that England could and should learn from violence reduc-
tion policy in Scotland when the beginning of a second period of crisis
emerged in 2015.

In 2015, after more than a decade of similar trends, rates of violence in
England and Scotland began to diverge, as violence in England increased
sharply. Hospital-recorded assault with a sharp object in England rose from
a low of 3,643 in 2014/2015, to 5,053 in 2017/2018 (NHS Digital, 2021).
Tracking the national trend, homicides in London rose from ninety five
in 2014 to 137 in 2018 (MPS, 2023). Particular concern emerged over the
increase in homicides in London committed by young people aged under
twenty four involving knives or sharp implements, which rose by 200%,
from sixteen in 2013 to forty eight in 2017. The early months of 2018 saw a
particularly acute concentration of knife crime and homicides. Figure 6.2
shows the percentage change in the number of victims of homicide for all
four jurisdictions between 2015/2016 and 2022/2023. The chart on the left
shows an increase in homicides in London between 2015 and 2019, before
reducing, and an overall increase in England and Wales, while the chart on
the right shows a decline in the number of homicide victims in Scotland,
and particularly in Glasgow, during this period.

The crisis conditions of this period also brought out tensions between
differing scales of political process in England (Jonas, 2015), most notably
between the city of London and the Westminster government. From 2015,
London was governed by a Labour Mayor, Sadiq Khan, operating alongside
a national Conservative Government. This opposition led to many claims
and counterclaims about who was responsible for the increase in violence
in the capital and who should lead on a response. In January 2018, articles
appeared across various media outlets reporting that the London Mayor
held the UK Government responsible for rising violence. Khan blamed 'real
term funding cuts to youth services, community groups, education, proba-
tion and the police', which he claimed had 'reversed decades of progress in
tackling the root causes of violent offending' (The Independent, 2018). In
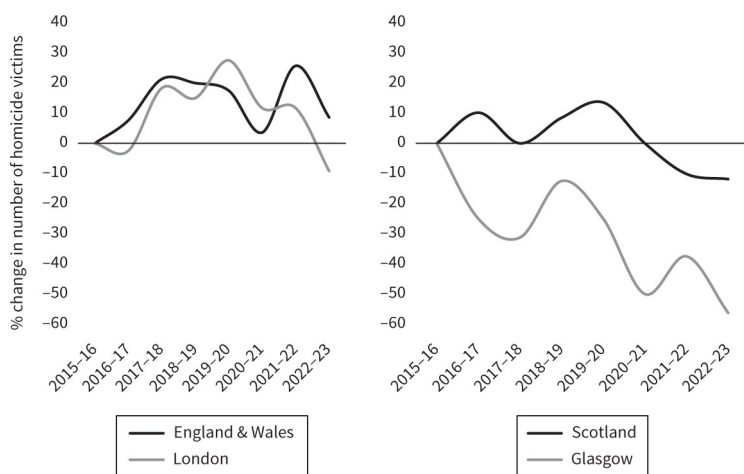
**Figure 6.2**  Percentage change in the number of homicide victims in England & Wales/London and Scotland/Glasgow, 2015/2016 to 2022/2023 (data indexed at 2015/2016)

*Sources*: Office for National Statistics (2023) Appendix tables: Homicide in England and Wales; Metropolitan Police Service Homicide Statistics (2024); Scottish Government (2023) Homicide in Scotland 2022/2023.

response, a UK Government spokesperson countered that, 'The Mayor of London is accountable to the public for the Met's performance and is empowered to raise local precept to increase funding' (ibid.). These statements unfolded into a blame game between the Labour London Mayor and the Conservative Government, serving to amplify attention on the issue of violence in London. This jostling for position in the policy field added to the growing sense that a meaningful response was required urgently.

On 5 April 2018, six stabbings in London in ninety minutes attracted significant media attention at regional and national scales (Daily Telegraph, 2018a). At the same time, several media outlets picked up on the fact that London's homicide rate had (if only temporarily) surpassed that of New York (Daily Telegraph, 2018b). One of our interviewees working close to the heart of government recalled the sense of crisis within the London Mayor's office during this period, stating that Sadiq Khan was going 'ape shit' about central government cuts to funding for the Metropolitan Police and youth provision across the capital. Another participant, who was London's Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime at the time, reflected on the atmosphere in London in 2018 in the following terms: 'Pretty awful—it was

really awful. You know, the numbers of murders and violence in London, and the pressure and the challenge we were under to really try and start to turn the tide' (Politician 1, England). Under public, political and media pressure to get the situation under control, Khan hosted an emergency City Hall summit on serious violence on 10 April 2018, attended by the Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, and the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Cressida Dick. High rates of violence continued in the following months, prompting comments from political figures abroad, including then-US President, Donald Trump. Trump took aim at Khan, claiming that a 'once very prestigious' London hospital had 'blood all over the floors', adding that 'they say it's as bad as a military war-zone hospital' (The Guardian, 2018).

In June 2018, under further pressure following several high profile murders of teenagers involving the use of knives, Khan hosted another summit, this time focused squarely on knife crime in London. The event brought together representatives from local authorities, probation service, Youth Justice Board, NHS England, young people, charities, police officers and members of the London Assembly. Among other things, the summit provided a clear indication that, from Khan's perspective, violence was a complex problem requiring coordinated action. At the very least, tackling it demanded more than policing and enhanced enforcement alone. To address the perceived crisis of rising rates of violence, Khan—and subsequently the UK Government—took the unusual step of looking north of the border for policy ideas, leading to the emergence of the language of public health.

## Reframing the debate

The process of reconciling existing opposites is a central facet of symbolic revolutions (Petzke, 2022) and, as argued in chapter 4, formed an important element in the discursive reframing of violence in Scotland. In this section, we examine some violence reduction policy initiatives in England that emerged in response to the periods of crisis outlined in the previous section. In particular we consider the extent to which these policy initiatives involved a departure from the status quo by pushing beyond existing binaries of enforcement and welfare responses. All four of these policy initiatives have been framed by policymakers in the language of public health approaches to violence reduction, made popular in large part because of the perceived success of violence reduction policy in Scotland (see Home

Office, 2019c). Yet, as we shall argue, when looking more closely at how the public health approach was interpreted and implemented England, we see a different collection of policies and practices to those that have developed in Scotland. This, in part, is rooted in the divergent histories of youth justice discussed in chapter 2.

Though youth justice policy in England and Wales has involved elements of both punitivism and welfarism, it is broadly viewed as more punitive in orientation than Scotland's 'Kilbrandon' ethos. The election of the Conservative Government in 1979 on a 'law and order' manifesto brought with it tough penal rhetoric and plans for the reintroduction of detention centres with tougher regimes, and 'short, sharp, shock' sentences (Chaney, 2015), culminating in a discursive shift from 'children in need' to the rediscovery of the 'deliberately depraved delinquent' and a subsequent emphasis on control (Tutt, 1981). The early 1990s then saw the emergence of a 'tough' bipartisan consensus in England (Downes and Newburn, 2022). This affected many areas of policy, including youth justice, with the Government announcing a range of measures—such as the introduction of Secure Training Centres—intended to display its robust credentials (Johnstone and Bottomley, 1998). When New Labour swept to power in 1997, they advanced their own 'tough' approach to youth crime to be seen as 'the party of law and order in Britain' (The Labour Party, 1997).

New Labour's attempts to be 'tough on crime' was reflected in what Loveday (2007: 28) described as the 'party political "virility test" of increased police numbers'. By 2007, there was a record number of 140,000 police officers employed in England and Wales. These new officers were organized around a new system of performance targets, and empowered with new punitive sanctions, including the Antisocial Behaviour Order (ASBO), which had been explicitly designed to tackle youth offending (Squires, 2008). A parallel development to an increasing number of police officers and punitive sanctions was the establishment of Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), which were introduced as the part of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. YOTs are multi-agency groups designed to connect the disparate elements of the institutional archipelago, including police, probation, health, education, and social services. As such, they represented an early attempt to enhance multi-agency working—an issue that would come to occupy a central position in England's public health approach discussed in more detail in chapter 7.

The tensions and path-dependencies within this brief account of youth justice reform in England and Wales provide important context to

understanding the emergence and implementation of the violence reduction policy initiatives discussed in the following sections.

## London's Shield Initiative

As noted above, the perceived crisis generated by the English riots prompted a clearly defined example of 'policy learning' between Scotland and England in the area of violence reduction. In a statement at an emergency session of Parliament on 11 August 2011, for example, then Prime Minister, David Cameron (2011), declared: 'I want us to use the record of success against gangs from cities such as Boston in the USA, and, indeed, from Strathclyde in Scotland, who have engaged the police, the voluntary sector and local government. I want this to be a national priority'. However, it took a number of years for this national level declaration of intent to manifest in a significant concrete policy initiative, which ultimately came at a regional scale.

As discussed briefly in chapter 2, in 2014 London Mayor, Boris Johnson hosted an International Gang Summit at City Hall, to which he invited Karyn McCluskey, Director of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU), along with many other violence experts including Cure Violence (Mayor of London, 2014). The following year, Johnson announced that the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) would establish a £200,000 pilot of a gang violence intervention which came to be known as 'Shield' (Mayor of London, 2015). Senior professionals working in MOPAC met and conversed with members of the SVRU. Claiming to have learned from the Scottish experience, Johnson was clear that Shield had been directly inspired by the gang violence intervention programme in Glasgow, known as the Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV). As part of this initiative, Strathclyde police identified gang-involved young men and invited them to 'call-in' sessions at Glasgow Sheriff Court. Those who voluntarily attended these sessions were offered a range of support services and opportunities provided by public and third sector organizations, aimed at preventing participants' involvement in gang violence (Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, 2011). At the same time, participants were warned of the serious consequences of not desisting from weapon carrying and violence (Donnelly and Tombs, 2008). In this regard, CIRV represented a practical effort to reframe debate by combining enforcement and welfare approaches to violence prevention.

Despite a lack of clear evaluative evidence,[1] the CIRV programme in Glasgow was widely perceived as a success, with Johnson claiming that it had 'seen youth violence drop by almost 50%' (Mayor of London, 2015: np). An influential right-leaning think tank, The Centre for Social Justice, made similar claims (Centre for Social Justice, 2018: 38) and, in a report aimed at identifying how best to reduce violence in London, the Liberal Democrat Group in the London Assembly also claimed that CIRV 'cut overall gang violence by 46%' (Pidgeon, 2015: 14). In short, CIRV provided the legitimating bedrock on which Shield was premised. Shield was implemented across three London boroughs: Haringey, Lambeth, and Westminster. As with Glasgow CIRV, it was based on the principle, 'one rule for all'—the idea that if one individual was found to have committed a violent offence, their whole group should be held accountable. While Glasgow CIRV had successfully managed to navigate the tension between welfare and enforcement approaches to violence prevention, however, Shield was perceived as an oppressive enforcement initiative and as such was met with fierce local opposition from numerous community groups concerned about its potential unfairness and racially disproportionate impact (Institute for Race Relations, 2015). Ultimately, this opposition proved fatal, and an evaluation of the pilot reported that the already strained race relations between communities in Haringey, Lambeth, and Westminster and the Met police were further damaged by Shield, with 'a substantial proportion' of community gang workers being 'unwilling to be associated with Shield in any way' (Davies et al., 2016: 19). The same evaluation also found that the pilot had 'failed to demonstrate a significant reduction in violence' and was beset by a raft of 'challenges in implementation [that] resulted in no clear test of the model' (Davies et al., 2016: 5).

Two points are worth noting. First, although ultimately unsuccessful in terms of its outcomes, the Shield initiative nevertheless points towards the precipitating role of crisis conditions in creating the space for policy change, and, in particular, in prompting a degree of policy learning between English and Scottish policymakers. The strong narrative concerning CIRV's success in reducing violence led the Conservative Mayor of London, Boris Johnson—who had earlier referred to Scottish devolution as a 'disaster',

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[1] The sole quasi-experimental evaluation of a SVRU programme—the CIRV programme discussed in the chapter 5—found no significant reduction in participants' involvement in serious violence, although there was some evidence that participants showed a reduction in weapon carrying (Williams et al., 2014).

and, as editor of The Spectator, published a poem referring to the Scots as a 'verminous race'—to actively seek to emulate a Scottish violence reduction policy. Despite its lack of success in terms of reducing violence, the inter-personal connections that the Shield initiative facilitated meant that those English policymakers and professionals involved learned more about the SVRU and the public health approach to violence reduction more generally. In this sense, the Shield initiative reflects the 'generative effects of apparent failure in policy-making', where even 'categorical failures' can nevertheless spawn new policy initiatives that have the potential to succeed where earlier attempts have failed (Baker and McCann, 2020: 1179).

Second, the Shield initiative highlights the importance of local context in cases of policy transfer—in this instance, the strong forces of 'resistance or skepticism' (Baker and McCann, 2020: 1182), deeply rooted in racial-ized police-community tensions in London. More specifically, as discussed in chapter 2, the Metropolitan Police have a long-standing reputation of racially discriminatory forms of policing, particularly concerning the Black community (Fatsis, 2019). Both of these points are worth bearing in mind as we turn next to the policy decision to establish regional Violence Reduction Units in England and Wales.

## Violence Reduction Units

When increasing rates of violence in England during 2015–2018 brought about a second perceived period of crisis, this opened up a second oppor-tunity for policy change in the area of violence reduction. Propelled in part by party political conflict across the scales of regional and national governments, England and Wales saw the wholesale adoption of Violence Reduction Units (VRUs), ostensibly based on the SVRU.

The regional VRU policy initiative in England and Wales was driven by the research and lobbying of the cross-party Youth Violence Commission. In 2016, concerned by rising rates of serious violence, a group of MPs from each of the main political parties formed a Commission to search for policy solutions. To support their work, Head of the Commission, MP Vicky Foxcroft, assembled a team of academics,[2] professionals in the public sector, and third sector youth organizations. From 2016–2018, the Commission

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[2]  These included one of the authors of this book.

organized evidence sessions on the Parliamentary estate to garner expert opinion on both the causes of violence and ways to address the problem. In addition, based on the 'Scottish miracle' of violence decline over the previous decade, members of the Commission travelled to Scotland to learn about the work of the SVRU. Impressed by what they learned, the Commission's interim report recommended emulating Scotland's public health approach to violence reduction and establishing VRUs in England and Wales (Youth Violence Commission, 2018). The Commission also worked with London's leading regional newspaper, the *Evening Standard*, in July 2018, which led with a front page story promoting the cross-party Youth Violence Commission's recommendations (Cohen, 2018).

Head of the Commission, Labour MP Vicky Foxcroft, argued in the interim report that 'we can, and should, learn from … the Violence Reduction Unit in Scotland', and called on her fellow Labour colleague and London Mayor, Sadiq Khan, to establish a London VRU, based on the Scottish model (Youth Violence Commission, 2018). Khan subsequently met with Foxcroft in August 2018 to discuss the Commission's recommendations, before announcing the establishment of a London VRU shortly thereafter (Mayor of London, 2020). In establishing a 'Violence Reduction Unit' and promoting its establishment as an initiative that would keep Londoners safe, Khan drew directly on the language of public health. He stressed publicly that the London VRU would 'not deliver results overnight … and the solutions [would] take time' (Mayor of London, 2018: np). Nevertheless, one participant, who was Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime at the time, was keen to highlight that this initiative was more than simply a cheap political gimmick:

> In the early stages, I transferred straight away over a million pounds from MOPAC's coffers to the Violence Reduction Unit as a way of saying, "Look, we're serious about this … we're serious because we're going to put some money behind it, and we're going to divert money away from, you know, we're going to cut, take money and give it to the Violence Reduction Unit." (Politician 1, England)

Not long after the decision to establish the London VRU, in March 2019, then-UK Prime Minister Theresa May spoke in admiring terms of the 'excellent work done under what was Strathclyde Police, now Police Scotland, using the public health approach' (Gourtsoyannis, 2019: np). In a matter of months, the Home Office (2019) announced funding to establish eighteen regional VRUs across the areas of England and Wales experiencing the

highest rates of violence, rescaling the policy initiative from the local to the national.[3] The rationale behind this decision shared much in common with the initial establishment of the London VRU. The problem of rising rates of violence was particularly acute in London, but similar concerns existed in many other regions of England and Wales where rates of knife crime appeared to be increasing (NHS Digital, 2021). While an exceptional level of pressure was exerted on the London Mayor, UK government policy was also subject of media scrutiny, with mainstream media outlets raising concerns over rising rates of violence across the country (The Independent, 2018; Sky News, 2018; The Guardian, 2018b).

Some involved in the establishment of the London VRU felt that the precise nature of the Government's reaction—their decision to establish a further seventeen VRUs—was closely connected to the action the Mayor of London had taken the previous year. For example, one senior politician recalled:

> I hope it's not too big-headed or too arrogant to think we had a huge influence on that [the decision of the Home Office to establish seventeen additional VRUs]. I genuinely think the Mayor of London setting up a Violence Reduction Unit within London just moved the dial on this … things started changing in government, in the Home Office, and around the public health approach. Because previously, that had never really been in the narrative or the messaging, or the communications, or in the language of government. It then started becoming the language of government and then Violence Reduction Units were set up. And I genuinely think that was because we had [established the London Violence Reduction Unit] and it just shifted the dial. Then, you know, [Person A] actually moved from MOPAC into the Home Office, which is always the case, isn't it, there's always these people connections. (Politician 1, England)

Like the 'New York miracle' discussed in chapter 2, the Scottish success story became so powerful as a political narrative that a sequence of senior

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[3]  London was one of the eighteen areas, meaning that technically the Home Office was not establishing a VRU in this region, but bolstering funding for the existing VRU that had been established by the London Mayor the previous year.

stakeholders in violence prevention—from elite policymakers to frontline practitioners—embarked on a series of pilgrimages to Scotland. As Peck and Theodore (2015: xvi) note, 'learning curves can be shortened—sometimes dramatically ... by borrowing from a well-known model'. During this period there was a sense in which—like a religious experience—policy tourists sought to see the source and return with a souvenir. Mirroring the earlier movement of senior politicians to New York, these pilgrimages involved some of the most significant decision-makers in Westminster, with successive UK prime ministers travelling from London to Glasgow. Subsequently, a raft of Home Office civil servants, staff in the London Mayor's office, representatives of the cross-party Youth Violence Commission, and most latterly, directors from the regional VRUs in England and Wales, traced the same path. The redirection of this Westminster policy learning from the United States to Scotland was unprecedented and emerged, in part, from the confluence of leadership, data and storytelling described in chapters 4 and 5.

Charismatic leaders may be invested with what Weber (1968: 245) termed 'specific gifts of body and spirit' that anoint their decisions and actions with 'a kind of tincture, a special element or quality' (Turner, 2003: 9). Many of our interviewees who had made the pilgrimage to Glasgow reported not only being struck by the personalities of those who had driven change in Scotland, investing the VRU with a form of 'charismatic authority' (Weber, 1968), but like Scottish participants remembered word-for-word some of the messages that had been communicated during private conversations and public speeches. Key phrases associated with the SVRU, including 'proceed until apprehended', 'violence is preventable, not inevitable', 'all behaviour is communication', and 'work with the willing', were repeated verbatim by interviewees. In this way, the narrative communication of success in Scotland became ingrained at an individual level among policymakers and practitioners, in turn prompting action within England's national and regional policymaking fields.

There was nothing in particular to 'see' in Glasgow. And yet, countless people opted to make the journey to visit in person. One civil servant spoke about the influence of one individual in particular, Karyn McCluskey, in a manner that resonated with the concept of 'charismatic gurus', identified in other studies of policy movement (McLeod, 2013: 2201). Thinking back to their experience in Glasgow and its legacy, they reflected:

So, then myself [and colleagues] flew up to Glasgow and we spent a day, maybe a bit more than a day with the VRU there, which is obviously

fantastic . . . I kept in touch with Karyn, kind of on and off, you know what it's like seeing her speak–it's like, amazing. So, I was like, you're the best human being, and I must just follow you around and learn from you. (Civil Servant 5, England)

This individual led the development of the London VRU and became centrally involved in the establishment of the additional seventeen regional VRUs across England and Wales. They described McCluskey as 'the best human being'—someone that they felt compelled to follow around and learn from. The same civil servant, as well as another senior policymaker who played an integral role in setting up and guiding the early development of London's VRU, continued: 'There was a period of lots of people going to visit each other to find out about stuff, and you know, fine, but I didn't go to Glasgow and think, "I'm going to copy that and put it in London."' Similarly, a politician interviewed for the project reflected: 'the strategy is directly modelled on [the Scottish VRU], isn't it? I mean, it's obviously not, as everyone talks about, it's not lift and shift' (Politician 1, England).

It is clear, therefore, that the Scottish success story and its leading voices captured the attention of many working in the policy field south of the border. The narrative inspired numerous pilgrimages to Glasgow to learn more about the SVRU's work and played a pivotal role in convincing policymakers to establish ostensibly analogous VRUs in England and Wales. As we will come to argue, though there was no one leader with a 'split habitus' (Bourdieu, 2017) capable of uniting this disparate group, the cross-party nature of its constitution created an 'unsettling ambiguity' (Arrigoni, 2022) in the midst of the adversarial Westminster field, which was instrumental to the successful tethering of a new political agenda to the current crisis.

The language of public health and references to long-term solutions as part of the establishment of both the London and regional VRUs was a significant departure from a previous reliance on short-term enforcement tactics to suppress violence, including for example, the ramping up of police stop and search, and increasing the severity of penalties for knife carrying (see Rizzo, 2017). Indeed, the founding of VRUs and the increase in the language of public health offered the possibility of reconciling the opposites of welfare and enforcement. Another organization that came from this fertile period in the development of violence reduction policy in England and Wales, the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF), sought to take this message further.

## Youth Endowment Fund

While the YEF also grew out of the crisis of rising rates of violence during the period 2015–2018, its origins were very different to those of the regional VRUs, as was its approach to reducing violence. The Home Office (2019a) established the YEF in March 2019, based on the belief that violence reduction required a firm scientific basis, grounded in the logic of randomized control trials (RCTs) and robust and reliable quantitative data (Rosbrook-Thompson et al., 20204). Its roots lay in a 'knowledge gap' that had been identified in the Government's 2018 *Serious Violence Strategy*, which stated, 'While… evidence exists for the US, no UK interventions were identified that had measured effects on serious violence' (Home Office, 2018a: 41). The Strategy suggested that too many violence reduction interventions were taking place in England and Wales without being robustly evaluated. As such, there was no way of knowing whether these interventions were producing their desired effects, or whether they were good value for money. YEF's mission, therefore, was as follows: 'We're here to prevent children and young people becoming involved in violence. We do this by finding out what works and building a movement to put this knowledge into practice' (Youth Endowment Fund, 2024a).

Unlike the VRUs, which were a clear instance of policy movement, the YEF did not draw any direct policy inspiration from Scotland. As one participant, who was Executive Director of YEF at the time, recalls: 'I'm struck that quite a number of people [think it was their thing]. In all fairness, they're probably all telling the truth … I mean, in practice, government is this multi-headed beast' (National Charity Leader 3, England). Inspiration for the YEF came from the US-based 'what works' paradigm, which had already proved influential in other policy areas in England and Wales, including education, health, well-being, and the economy (Evaluation Task Force, 2023). In short, 'what works' thinking is grounded in an experimental logic, centring randomized control trials, or 'RCTs', as the only method capable of generating a 'gold standard' of evidence (Jones and Podolsky, 2015). Rather than reconciling the opposites of welfare and punishment via the language of public health, the YEF sought to replace these debates with an emphasis on evidence. In the words of the YEF's Executive Director, it did this by emphasizing a 'smart' approach to violence reduction, which pushed beyond existing tensions between 'tough' and 'soft' approaches: 'Making this country safe for everyone isn't about being tough or soft on crime. It's about being SMART on crime. We increasingly know what works, so let's

do it' (Yates, 2024). From the outset, then, the YEF focused squarely on developing a 'toolkit' of violence reduction interventions, which detailed their cost, estimated impact on violence crime, and the evidence quality for these estimated impacts (YEF, 2024b). As will be discussed in chapter 7, however, the couching of this form of evaluation in the principles of New Public Management, commissioning and marketization, have led to qualitatively different framings of the concept of 'public health' to the more 'figurative' interpretation in Scotland (Rosbrook-Thompson et al., 2024), which was characterized by several participants as a 'Wild West' environment involving both 'innovation' and 'chaos'.

## Serious Violence Duty

The final policy initiative that might be seen as an effort to reconcile opposites is the Serious Violence Duty (hereafter, the Duty), which came into force on 31 January 2023 as part of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. From the outset, the Duty was framed by Prime Minister Theresa May and Home Secretary Sajid Javid as a key component 'underpin[ning] the multi-agency, public health approach' (May and Javid, 2019: np). In short, the Duty required a number of public services—including police, probation, youth offending teams, fire and rescue services, health and local authorities—to plan, collaborate and work together to reduce violence. The basic premise of the Duty is that, too often, services whose work has the potential to protect and safeguard young people were operating in isolation from one another, thereby undermining the potential effectiveness of their efforts. By imposing a statutory duty on these services to work together, the intention was that improvements could be made in the form of enhanced data sharing, reduced duplication of work, and more coherent and complementary services.

The Duty may be seen as a coercive tool that enforces collaboration between organizations. If partner agencies refuse to engage with one another on the issue of violence reduction, they will be in breach of UK legislation (see Home Office, 2022: 101–103). Indeed, the top-down and mandatory nature of the Duty stands in stark contrast to the bottom-up and voluntary approach driven by the SVRU. For example, one SVRU member emphasized that one of the keys to success in Scotland came in assembling a 'coalition of the willing'. However, in the context of the contested nature of the

policy field, in which power is largely centralized, directors of regionalized VRUs found the Duty offered a rescaling of decision-making authority that was empowering. As these two VRU Directors put it:

> I think what [the Duty] has actually done is pushed that idea of joining up workstreams, understanding that systems change has to happen in order to implement some of what we're trying to deliver long term—that's started. I think we're seeing join up of exploitation and serious violence and county lines and things like that. There's a sort of movement to understand that these are not separate things, that they are all part of the same conversation. (VRU Director 7)

> I think what you can kind of read behind the Duty, and the draft guidance that sits behind it, is that the main trigger for [the Duty] is this piece around data sharing. And utilizing that to I suppose identify, or even if you like want to say predict, risk as early as possible. That's how I read the sort of main rationale behind it and it's very much focused around data sharing. (VRU Director 8)

To summarize, although England and Scotland might appear from the outside to have travelled similar paths to develop public health approaches to violence reduction, it is perhaps more useful to imagine the approach as splitting into two distinct beams as it entered the policy field of the United Kingdom. While CIRV was perceived as a success in Scotland, England's equivalent (Shield) flatly failed. And while Scotland's public health approach and the SVRU were primarily concerned with securing whole-system, cultural and organizational change based on building a coalition of the willing, the YEF and the Serious Violence Duty in England focused on quantitative experimental evaluation of violence reduction interventions and legislative directives respectively. Moreover, as will we argue in chapter 7, the priorities and ways of working of regional VRUs in England and Wales came to look very different to those associated with the SVRU. In part, we attribute these differences to historical path-dependencies in the policy field—based in part on the different levels of embeddedness of NPM principles (Hood, 1991; Elliott, 2023)—and the degree of possibility between fields that allowed for a different form of leadership to emerge in Scotland.

## Leadership and split habitus

As discussed in chapter 4, an important component of change in Scotland was the existence of charismatic leaders who bridged between different social environments, or 'fields' to mobilize a social movement. In England, the situation was quite different. The YEF and the Duty were driven by people whose 'governing habitus' (Brangan, 2023) was situated squarely in the Westminster policy field: government ministers, senior civil servants and special advisors ('spads'). Likewise, the Shield initiative in London was driven by the city's mayor and long-serving Conservative MP, Boris Johnson, with support from his team in the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime. The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, who had ultimate responsibility for establishing the first VRU in London has been described as 'a consummate manager' (Hatherley, 2020: 233–234), with authority derived from bureaucratic rather than charismatic authority (Weber, 1968).

The exception to this was, perhaps, the Youth Violence Commission, who were comprised of a team of cross-party MPs, academics, professionals in the public sector, and third sector youth organizations. This plurality allowed the Commission, like a think tank, to occupy 'a distinct sub-space of knowledge production at the crossroads between the academic, political, economic and media fields' (Arrigoni, 2022: 1287). The institutional legitimacy afforded to this group allowed a temporary space in which established party-political oppositions were set aside in the interests of violence reduction. The Youth Violence Commission members—although not embodied in a single 'leader' but in the form of a collective—reflected diverse backgrounds and were able, in the midst of adversarial politics at regional and national scales, to mobilize a 'space of possibility' (Bourdieu, 2017). When describing the Commission, Foxcroft stated that it, 'sought to involve the widest possible range of stakeholders, from young people and those engaged in frontline practice and grassroots charities, to academics, researchers and senior professionals and policymakers' (Irwin-Rogers et al., 2020: 8). This involvement extended not only to those invited to provide evidence to the Commission, but to those who shaped and supported its activities. Among others, this list included a retired police superintendent, a hospital surgeon, a secondary school headteacher, a consultant clinical psychologist, youth workers, CEOs of third sector organizations, and politicians from competing political parties. The Commission was, in an organizational sense, 'the product and marriage of biographical tensions and contradictions … uniquely suited to bring and hold together the opposites

of a field' (Petzke, 2022: 495). Comprising as it did a range of professionals with backgrounds in enforcement alongside welfare-oriented institutions, the Commission was well-placed to move beyond existing approaches to violence reduction (Rosbrook-Thompson et al., 2024). And its overarching recommendation to reframe the debate through the development of a public health approach promised to replicate the coherent and appealing combination of both enforcement and welfare components in Scotland's whole system approach.

The Commission resembled in Bourdieu's terms an entity that simultaneously embodied high status and rebellion, 'people who whilst totally "in" are also totally "out"' (Bourdieu, 2017: 377–378). In one sense, it was 'totally in', in that the Commission comprised a group of influential politicians from across the major political parties, as well as senior professionals and academics, who wielded a notable degree of power in their respective domains. In another sense, however, it was 'totally out'—while the Commission sought to influence national and regional governments, its members operated outside centres of power such as Cabinet membership. Regardless of how VRUs ultimately came be implemented, it is clear that the Commission's ability to navigate a plurality of policy fields helped to open up space for change in violence reduction policy.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored the nature and extent of change in violence reduction policy in England in recent years through application of the concept of symbolic revolution, focusing in particular on four major policy initiatives: the London Shield initiative, regional Violence Reduction Units, the Youth Endowment Fund, and the Serious Violence Duty. All of these policy initiatives took place on the back of a perceived period of crisis on the problem of youth violence—the former prompted by the 2011 English riots and the latter by rising rates of serious violence in England during the period 2015–2018. Two of the four initiatives—Shield and the VRUs—were a clear attempt at policy movement from Scotland to England. However, while they ostensibly sought to emulate the perceived success of their counterparts north of border, both ended up looking very different in practice. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, unlike its Scottish counterpart (CIRV), the London Shield initiative was an unequivocal policy failure. The impact of VRUs, on the other hand, is less clear-cut—while annual

evaluations (Home Office, 2022, 2023a, 2023b) suggest that these units may be reducing certain forms of violence to some extent in their respective regions, the violence decline in Scotland has not yet come to fruition.

The other two initiatives—the Youth Endowment Fund and the Serious Violence Duty—had their roots firmly in the Westminster policy-making field, with no inspiration being drawn from Scotland. Indeed, although both these initiatives were couched in terms of contributing to a public health approach to violence reduction, they reflect an orientation to policy-making and violence reduction policy that is somewhat alien to that seen in Scotland. More specifically, the Youth Endowment Fund—essentially a 'what works' centre for violence reduction—has prioritized robust experimental evaluations of interventions and the careful targeting of resources at those deemed to be 'high impact' and good value for money (see Home Office, 2018b; Jones and Podolsky, 2015). In Scotland, on the other hand, the priority appears to have been building a whole system approach to violence reduction based on a coalition of the willing, as well as trialling new and innovative ways of reducing violence regardless of the evidence base. And while the Serious Violence Duty represented a top-down initiative that served to coercively secure a greater degree of collaboration between public sector agencies, the approach in Scotland to whole system working appears to have been more organically grown from the bottom up. In chapter 7, we explore the dynamics of implementation of the public health approach to violence reduction in more detail, focusing particularly on the role of evidence, data and statistical evaluation.

# 7
# Cold Charisma and New Public Management

## Introduction

As Jones and Newburn (2021: 13) suggest, like the oral tradition of stories mutating as they pass from one place to the next, policy movement typically involves significant 'modification, mutation and reconfiguration'. In chapter 6, we traced the movement of the public health approach to violence reduction from Scotland to England through three components of a symbolic revolution: crisis, leadership, and the reconciliation of opposites. Spurred by a sense of crisis, policymakers and policy entrepreneurs south of the border looked to Scotland for a success story, and effectively articulated why the Scottish model should be replicated. However, putative policy transfer is never straightforward. Differences ranging from long-term political history to the idiosyncratic personalities of individual decision-makers can create profound barriers to the adoption of similar practices. Thus, where apparent transfer does occur, it tends to involve significant transformation and reconfiguration (Jones and Newburn, 2021). Despite political rhetoric emphasizing 'the lessons of Scotland' and a seemingly clear case of institutional replication via the introduction of VRUs into England and Wales, this point certainly applies to violence reduction policy transfer between Scotland, England and Wales. Policy ideas were certainly 'lifted' from Scotland, but not without substantial alteration, adjustment, and resistance.

In this chapter, we focus on the fourth of Petzke's components of a 'symbolic revolution'—canonical sources—to contrast the outcomes of the policy movement north and south of the border. Forced through the prism

of Westminster policy-making—as well as policy-making within regional and local policy scales in England—the public health approach was significantly modified. Crucial to this change, we argue, is the role played by New Public Management principles in shaping the form taken by the public health approach at both regional and national levels. The chapter is composed of two main sections. In the first, building on the brief description in chapter 2, we sketch a history of New Public Management within UK policy-making, before analysing the effects that NPM principles have had on the implementation of the public health approach within England and Wales—focused on contracting out, interventionism, and cultures of evaluation. In the second, we more directly contrast Scottish policy-making fields to those found in Westminster, and at more local levels within England, with a particular focus on legitimacy, narratives, and 'the cold charisma of numbers' (Mau, 2019: 13). Touching on themes from previous chapters, we offer concluding thoughts on the three-step journey which the public health approach has taken: developing through a movement of policy entrepreneurs in Scotland; travelling south into the rhetoric of the UK prime minister and other policymakers; and, lastly, moving through various bodies and agencies across England and Wales in its implementation phase. Through each of these steps, contrasts emerge in how public health approach ideas and practices were articulated, advocated, and brought to life, and we seek to bring into relief the institutional path-dependencies that have shaped this evolution.

## New Public Management in England and Wales

If you have got a right wing punitive government it is going to be very, very difficult to not be… become John the Baptist figures weeping and wailing outside the city walls, right? (Senior Civil Servant 3, Scotland)

The Home Office, they … since 2018, when they did their serious violence strategy, they talked to us before that….But from that … there's been a deafening silence and I think it's the … a change of government and a change of modus operandi with that government. (Civil Servant 1, Scotland)

Two key phrases within these quotes—'outside the city walls' and 'deafening silence'—convey the extent to which Scottish influence on the Westminster government's approach to violence seemingly diminished by the end of 2019. In early 2019, the Prime Minister Theresa May paid tribute to the work of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU), and co-authored a piece with Sajid Javid proclaiming the official adoption of the public health approach to violence reduction by the UK Government (May and Javid, 2019). By the August of the same year, however, Theresa May had been replaced by Boris Johnson. And perhaps even more importantly, the public health approach to violence reduction shifted status within the UK Government: from an inspirational idea cited in political rhetoric, into an officially adopted policy concept which needed to be implemented. Though 'pilgrimages' of English VRU leaders to see the SVRU may have continued, the UK Government decoupled policy from the earlier narrative of Scotland as a 'success story' as it went about implementing its version of the public health approach. Unsurprisingly, through this process of implementation, the public health approach came to look very different to how it had looked in Scotland. This is not just because of a change in prime minister but reflects profound differences between the policy fields of the Scottish and UK governments.

In this section, we reflect on the significance of a particular strand of political ideology—New Public Management—in explaining the shift from the success story of the SVRU to a more tightly defined sequential narrative (de Fina, 2003). Though rarely referenced directly by name, New Public Management (NPM) ideas were a frequent reference point in interviews with English and Welsh policymakers, community organizations, and practitioners. In particular, respondents emphasized the effects of NPM in shaping a set of core features within English violence reduction, which we summarize below under the headings of contracting out, interventionism, and cultures of evaluation. As we argue, these phenomena acted as principles of vision and division (Bourdieu, 1990) within a 'governing habitus' (Brangan, 2023) in which storytelling had relatively little purchase. Following a brief, sketched history of NPM's influence within the Westminster policy field, we outline how its principles have affected the shape taken by the public health approach at the level of the UK government, as well as more regional scales in England, as a means of apprehending the divergent impacts of public health discourse both north and south of the border.

## A brief history of NPM

After a slow gestation in UK and US think tanks throughout the 1970s (Stedman-Jones, 2014; Burgin, 2015; Sapiro, 2018), the core principles of New Public Management fully emerged in Britain under the Thatcher Government of the 1980s (Hay, 2007: 98). The central mission of those promoting NPM was to embed key marketizing assumptions about how public sector agencies needed to be reformed. By the early 1990s, these ideas and assumptions 'crystallized into a more specific set of recipes for public sector reform' (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011: 9). It was particularly after the publication of Hood's (1991) seminal paper on the topic that this 'set of recipes' became known collectively as 'New Public Management'. There are definitional disputes over what exactly constitutes NPM, but the 'core claim' of NPM is the need for more 'businesslike' practices in the public sector (see especially Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011: 10–22). This entails attempts to either mimic the private sector within public services, or to actually shift activities from the public to the private sector. Core definitional principles are the subject of debate, but most commonly include: pursuing maximum efficiency in the public sector; quantitative performance measurement; the efficacy of competition and the marketplace for delivering public goods, and the effectiveness of 'contracting out' services to the private or voluntary sector (Walsh, 1995; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). The goal of these practices is to make state activity more 'lean' and efficient, and to improve the quality of public service activity.

The extent to which New Public Management continues to exert influence over policy-making and public sector practice in England, particularly relative to other paradigms such as 'Neo-Weberianism' and 'New Public Governance', is the subject of considerable academic discussion (Dunleavy et al., 2006; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011; De Vries and Nemec, 2013; Caffrey, Ferlie and McKevitt, 2019). From the perspective of participants in our study, though, there are clear signs of NPM's 'strange resilience' into the present day, and of the power of 'enduring NPM elements' within violence reduction policy-making specifically (Caffrey, Ferlie and McKevitt, 2019). This is particularly due to the rise of austerity politics which has intensified many core features of New Public Management: the pressure on policy-makers to pursue efficiency, contract out services, and rigorously monitor finances. For community organizations and charities, similarly, the reduction of resources brought about by austerity has heightened competition,

and increased pressure on measuring results: with funding scarce, agencies compete to demonstrate the value of their outcomes.

In what follows we explore the enduring influence of NPM in the violence reduction policy field, focusing especially on a set of interconnected tendencies—contracting out, competition, interventionism, and cultures of evaluation—which, we argue, represent the 'canonical sources' setting the parameters of legitimacy for the public health approach to violence reduction south of the border.

## 'Contracting out'

'Contracting out' has been a key tool of public sector activity, associated with NPM and subsequent public sector paradigms, since the 1980s (Hood, 1991; Walsh, 1995; Hay, 2007; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). As Walsh (1995: xi–xviii) put it, there was a 'rapid expansion of competitive tendering' such that much of the public sector resembled 'a nexus of contracts' by the mid-1990s: government activity has increasingly been delivered through private and third sector organizations, via contracts which are 'won' by those organizations through competitive procurement. This process continued and accelerated into the early twenty first century. As social issues gain political prominence, therefore, organizations are aware of the potential for related commissioning activity—a government's public worry might well become the focus of a government contract. Thus, when governmental agencies begin to stress the importance of an issue, and to produce data, reports, and policy papers focused on it, these are pored over 'with peculiar intensity' by 'voluntary and statutory organizations continually hungry for money' (Rock, 1995: 12). This aligns with the shift in prevailing new public governance models away from 'core government institutions' to an emphasis on 'subsidiarity' (Hood, 1991: 3): when faced with a problem, governments increasingly turn to the commissioning of external agencies to deliver new activities, as opposed to, for instance, enhancing funding for key state institutions such as schools or social care services.

'Contracting out' has had a particular influence on the development of the criminal justice system in England and Wales over the past three decades. Since the 1990s especially, various forms of 'market making'—in probation, prisons, and offender management for instance—have altered the role of the state within criminal justice: increasingly, government bodies

act as 'commissioning agents' as much as, or more than, direct providers of services and institutions (Corcoran, 2020: 17-18). Violence reduction is no exception, with the commissioning of violence reduction activities growing substantially in recent years, producing what some scholars have described as associated 'industries'—Hallsworth (2013), for instance, critiques the 'gang industry', and Williams and Squires (2021) similarly describe a 'Knife Crime Industry'.

Our respondents discussed the effects of 'contracting out' and commissioning practices within violence reduction at length. A common phrase used by officials within Violence Reduction Units, for instance, was 'money out the door'—reflecting the pressure they felt to rapidly commission services, particularly when VRUs were first formed. One senior figure within an English Violence Reduction Unit stated:

> The biggest challenge was that there was this pot of funding, which was meant to be an annual funding settlement, but we had to spend it within six months, which is a bit at odds with the public health approach. . . . We were commissioning interventions in quick time, before we really understood what it was that we needed to commission, so it was a bit of a messy time for us locally. . . . Across the VRU network nationally, there are some areas that spent, like 80, 90% of their budget on commissioning services . . . when grant money comes in [from the Home Office], it's quite unusual to spend it on anything other than commissioning services. (VRU Director 7, England)

Two points are evident from this quotation. Firstly, the 'nexus of contracts' associated with NPM (Walsh, 1995) is apparent. The VRUs are contracted by the Home Office, with an associated 'pot of funding', and the VRUs in turn contract organizations to undertake interventions; in some cases, there is then further subcontracting, as well as a parallel contracting arrangement for external evaluation. Though published Home Office guidance (2020: 29) specifies that VRUs are to spend 'no less than 20% of their funding on interventions', interviews with participants suggest that many VRUs took the decision to spend a far greater proportion of their grant in this way, feeling that this would be viewed positively by the Home Office, or that this was an expedient way of spending money quickly. Secondly, and relatedly, the pace of commissioning activity appears to be swift and unrelenting—under intense time pressure, VRUs pursued rapid contracting arrangements, as a route to getting 'money out the door'. In the quote above, the respondent

directly contrasts this with the public health approach, a core component of which is to undertake a careful assessment of local needs, and to understand and address the deep-rooted, population-level causes of violence (see e.g. Home Office, 2020; Fraser and Irwin-Rogers, 2021).

The pressure to prioritize the commissioning of interventions has been resisted within some English VRUs, through various means. One senior VRU official said, for example, 'I do want a chunk ... spent on staff, on doers, people to actually do things, which I know other areas didn't make that decision, and as a result they really struggled to keep that balance between the different principles of a public health approach' (VRU Director 5). The contrast that this participant draws between the commissioning of short-term interventions with recruiting 'people to actually do things' is starkly drawn, reflecting a tension between a traditional view of public sector agencies as direct providers of public goods—staffed by skilled exponents of a 'public service ethos' (see Hay, 2007)—and the more NPM-inspired perspective, that public bodies are best viewed as facilitators of external activities, thus dedicating substantial resource to the commissioning and monitoring of those activities. Again, this respondent draws attention to the tension with the public health approach, referring to the balance between specific, evidence-based interventions and planning for long-term societal outcomes (Home Office, 2020).

If some senior public sector officials with commissioning responsibilities raised concerns about the tension between 'contracting out' and the public health approach, this was also echoed from those grassroots organizations increasingly dependent on the seeking of contracts. One grassroots community youth practitioner gave their perspective:

> Say where I've grown up, if I've done really well in life how am I going to be able to get back and deliver something within the community I live in? It's difficult to find a route now other than setting up one of these ... a charity, or a CIC [Community Interest Company], or whatever, to do it. We don't know these things... I just think it's absurd when there're lots of people who just naturally know how to do that stuff. Why not ensure that they have a voice and have capacity to also offer something to these discussions, people who can just ... if an incident was escalating could just tap someone on the shoulder and it would de-escalate through a normal conversation.... We're just excluded from all of these parties as we're not able to secure £500,000 in funding to I guess validate our ideas and pilot and showcase it. (Youth Worker 4, England)

This practitioner's sentiment echoes recent research into the challenges faced by smaller organizations seeking to win competitive funding contracts, which found a tendency for 'big boys gobbling up tenders'; for larger organizations to occasionally influence the tender documents to which they later respond; and for larger organizations to develop 'sophisticated expert capacity' for winning contracts (Macmillan and Paine, 2021: 618–620). This has been identified as a prominent feature within the marketization of the criminal justice system more specifically; Corcoran (2020: 19), for instance, noted that the largest providers engage in highly effective 'contract chasing', leading to a 'concentration of contracts' in their hands. Central to this process are perceptions of professionalism. It is well-established that funders' 'default position' tends to be a preference for those demonstrating a 'like-minded' professional habitus, as 'an assurance of competent practice' (Alexander, 2023b: 4), often to the exclusion of those who, as the practitioner quoted above put it, may 'just naturally know how to do that stuff'. Thus, the same organizations can be found occupying multiple positions within the 'nexus of contracts', often across multiple jurisdictions. This reflects a tension between the organizational habitus within the sector and the new diktats of the policy field, but more importantly suggests that interventions delivered by larger, less locally-rooted organizations may be crowding out more informal, relational, community-based forms of activity.

This points to a recurring issue with commissioning practices identified in prior research. Far from maximizing efficiency, the obligation that these practices place on agencies to dedicate substantial resources to bid-winning capacity is a significant cause of inefficiency (Walsh, 1995), negating a key principle of public health approaches to work 'with and for communities' (Home Office, 2020: 12–15). As discussed in chapter 5, the SVRU placed significant emphasis on working with communities, including recruitment of individuals with expertise derived from lived experience, thereby nurturing a space 'between social spaces' (Eyal, 2013), with actors straddling the policy world and community realities.

English policymakers and practitioners, both those involved in the curation of funding and those compelled to compete within them, grapple with the role that competition has come to play in violence reduction. For instance, the following quotes are from a VRU manager who commissions services, and a charity manager engaged in seeking funding from violence reduction commissioning agencies. In different ways, both discuss the impacts of competitive tendering and individualizing impacts which, in many ways, militate against the building of a coherent movement for change:

Everybody has an answer. Everybody wants to tell you that they can build Rome in a day. I think that's how we've all been conditioned that we are the only ones that can do it. I know all the gang members so yeah, come talk to me. I'm like, why don't you just bring everyone that you know so we can all have a conversation on how we can all reduce violence. It's like someone wants to have the answer that I did it, I'm the one who did it. (VRU Member 2, England)

The whole of this meeting [organized by a VRU] we went around ... it was like a two and a half hour meeting, and everybody basically talked about what they were doing and why it was so great ... it suddenly crystallized what the problem was here ... what are you trying to achieve here, what are the fundamental principles that you believe to be true? Then there was a kind of scratching of heads (National Charity Manager 3, England).

Both interviewees vividly convey the atmosphere of competition: 'everybody' is asserting what they can do, why it's 'so great'. For both the commissioner and charity manager, this atmosphere is not conducive to what they see as the more appropriate form of organizing activity—in which shared 'fundamental principles' are discussed, to discern 'how we can all reduce violence'. Networked coordination and collaboration are made more difficult in a field organized and governed by contract and competition.

The 'winners' within the competitive field of contracting, notably, experience an immediate shift in mode of activity. Participants characterized this change as from competitive relationships with 'rivals' for contracts, to a period of compliance, dominated by a singular, vertical relationship with the commissioner. As Macmillan and Paine (2021: 620) have put it, those who win such contracts rapidly transition from the 'excitement of success' to the 'anxiety of delivery'—particularly where they experience tension between 'rigidity' in the contract they must comply with, and the 'flexible, relational' approach they seek to maintain in their professional practice. This tension was evident when hearing from those who had won contracts to deliver violence reduction activities:

You look at who have the influence, it's definitely the funders. Because without the money there is no actual work being done....as much as we want to do stuff on the ground, we can't do anything without the resources. So, we're dictated and governed by funding available. What

isn't happening though, is they're not allowing people at the bottom, grassroots to govern what needs to take place.... We're having to fit a matrix, because somebody sat in the [commissioning agency] came up with a programme. And then we've got to fit to that programme. And that's a problem. (Youth Worker 2, England)

The rigidity imposed on activity is clear: activity is 'dictated and governed' by what is deemed fundable, and by the programmes designed by funders. Where violence reduction is delivered through contract, those who draft and monitor the contracts hold the power to define and resolve a problem in a top-down manner. As evident in the quote above, those delivering violence reduction activities seek to resist and subvert that power through various means, but the parameters, terms and terrain of that struggle remain constrained by their contracts. In the following section we explore some of the consequences of these constraints.

## Interventionism

The conditions of the violence reduction policy field in England are conducive to the proliferation of certain forms of activity over others. The prominence of competitive contracting as an organizing feature of the field contributes to the prevalence of discrete, short-term, time-bound, targeted interventions, which Stevens et al. (2025) refer to as 'interventionitis'. Furubo identifies this reliance on interventions as a significant feature of Anglo-American policy-making since the rise of New Public Management, characterizing it as 'piecemeal social engineering' (Furubo, 2019: 15). Rather than seeking to build a better society through legislative change, institutional investment, or movement-building, this paradigm privileges well-defined packages of activity grounded in 'a strict link between goals, means and objectives', which are 'targeted at specific groups of people, in given places, [with a clear] time horizon' (Furubo, 2019: 15; Stame, 2019: 33–39).

This preference has long been observed within English violence reduction. Hallsworth (2013: 189) suggested that, within a marketized public sector, 'the custodians of the money ... expect to see innovation and novelty in the programmes they fund and, as such, generic long-standing interventions are not usually well looked-upon'. Similarly, youth workers interviewed by Seal and Harris (2016: 104), for instance, expressed concern

about short-term targeting which meant they had to speed up their work, feeling that it eroded essential trust and relationships with young people, in service of the need to 'chase violence'. Most recently, Youth Offending Team workers have raised concerns to researchers about the short-term commissioning of third sector programmes, which resulted in 'short-lived projects, high turnover of staff, and practitioners not knowing what was available' (Phillips et al., 2022: 35).

A focus on discrete interventions among commissioners was a recurrent theme in our English interviews. One charity manager, for instance, expressed frustration at the limiting effect such policies had on designing of support services:

> I wish [violence reduction commissioners] were much more interested in what happens within universal settings, and what they could be doing to change the way that all teachers are engaging with children rather than thinking about, like, what's the best rugby intervention that you can have … they've got loads of money which they're dishing out to, like, end products, so people who say, yeah I'm going to do this, I'm going to do this … I think they're just looking for magic interventions … The way that we do that [address violence] is by chucking cash at interventions … the whole sort of interventions model, for me, it's just flawed. I mean, the idea that what we need to do is just constantly pass children on to things that magically kind of change them … one of the things of that I don't really see has changed since 2018 [is] that people still see the solution in funding outcome interventions. (National Charity Manager 1, England)

For this interviewee, there is value in both specific interventions and more broad-based 'primary' interventions, but the former had been prioritized at the expense of the latter. Along similar lines, another charity manager questioned the tendency to view school exclusion as a discrete issue which can be addressed in isolation from underlying issues, through particular stand-alone initiatives. The participant criticized the practice of viewing exclusions as 'the problem' with 'one solution', and suggested this may be an idiosyncratically English way of doing things: 'it's still this kind of English way of: here's the problem, so here's a solution and it's all in one word' (National Charity Manager 8, England). The reality of the issue, they argued, is 'much deeper', but they questioned whether 'the will is there from the top' to address those more entrenched, systemic problems.

For those in public office, but perhaps especially those held accountable for violence reduction, the 'politics of being seen to do something' (Power, 2007: 342) is evidently a potent force. Violence is a visceral phenomenon, and one which often feels urgent—particularly, as seen in chapter 6, in the wake of significant 'events' or marked increase in trends. As new entities, VRUs are particularly vulnerable to this pressure, at times directly expressed by their political sponsors, be they city mayors or Police and Crime Commissioners. A senior VRU manager shared a particularly striking story that exemplifies this point:

> After about four weeks of existence, a senior stakeholder saw me in a corridor somewhere, and said we need more sparkle, we need more glitz. . . . And it's trying to kind of resist that, you know, let's just spend money on a sparkly project that's going to look good in a newsletter or on Twitter or whatever. (VRU Director 2, England)

The need for 'glitz' and 'sparkle' in relation to the most harmful effects of violence offers a striking insight into the 'governing habitus' of those tasked with commissioning violence reduction interventions. Rather than engaging with community members and street-experienced youth, and responding to the issues as experienced, policymaking is pressed through the filter of the policy field which approaches social issues as abstract problems with bespoke solutions. From a different position in the field, a grassroots youth worker similarly critiqued the prominence of 'nice ameliorative programmes':

> The overall approach of the government is still one of, like, not dealing with economic inequality. And . . . but instead pumping money in to, like, charity and third sector to do nice ameliorative programmes that look like we're doing something to deal with violence reduction in a compassionate and in a . . . you know, nice, kind of, way whilst with the other hand things are still as normal, you know, massively unequal society becoming more and more unequal by the day with its boundaries policed by increasingly oppressive forms of state intervention. That's the bigger picture. But you do have some money plugged in to, like, these nice programmes to make everyone feel better. And . . . I mean, that's not the only reason they do it, it's not just to make people feel better, but I think by their nature things like [violence reduction agency] will never be sufficient to deal with these violence crises. (Youth Worker 6, England)

Where there is a felt pressure on policymakers to 'do something', to produce 'sparkle', and to pursue innovation, there is a strong incentive to focus on 'nice programmes', and to prioritize the 'innovation and novelty' to which Hallsworth referred. These forces, characteristic of new public governance approaches, can result in a public sector workforce 'accustomed to constant new initiatives' (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011: 318). In the quotes which follow, a violence reduction project lead describes the dead weight of this permanent pursuit of novelty, while a VRU staff member recalls encountering a similar frustration:

> I think there is a workforce that is exhausted by oh, here's another violence reduction programme. Here's the next knife crime initiative … I call it "new initiative fatigue", and I've felt it myself. . . . You've got a workforce who are genuinely exhausted by this and here's the next new thing, here's the next new thing. And oh, that funding's stopped now, you've got to retrain in this, you've got to try and deliver this. (Youth Justice Leader 1, England)

> I think one thing that we've definitely learned was a real eye opener, when you're going into a community group and telling them you've got this great idea, someone in the back is sitting there like oh yeah, you're the third person in my twenty years that has come here with a bright new spark idea, but you ain't done nothing. (VRU Member 4, England)

There is a tension evident between those occupying different positions within the violence reduction policymaking field. Those 'at the top', and particularly those elected officials seeking public displays of activity and effectiveness, are incentivized to prioritize immediate-term, well-packaged interventions. Those 'in the middle', tasked with implementing new approaches and programmes, face the scepticism and resistance of frontline practitioners. For example, an interviewee who has worked both for the SVRU and on the delivery of programmes for English VRUs remarked on a significant difference in his experiences north and south of the border:

> [At the SVRU] I was given the rein to look at [programme] and develop it, and I think that's missing from a lot of the VRUs in England. They're throwing money away at so many organizations and they're not really gripping the bits that work, you know, the big ones that can be sustained. If you give an organization money from the Home Office for

three months, get a return then move on to something else, you're not following a public health approach… I just think there could be more thought and more grip. I call it grip, I was given the opportunity to grip a programme, my colleague was gripping [programme X] and my other co-colleague was gripping [programme Y]. So these are our babies … I don't see that as much down in England, it's all very much project management … don't just be the project manager, immerse yourself, have a member of staff who immerses themselves, so that you start to see the way that it can go, the potential for it. (National Charity Manager 10, England)

This charity manager draws an important contrast between 'gripping' and 'immersing' in an initiative, which they experienced in Scotland, and a 'project management' approach in England. Apparent again is the tension between generic programme management skills, and the more grounded practice wisdom to be gained through longer-term engagement with frontline activity. Time and pace emerge once more as significant determinants of activity—in the English example, money is given to an organization to 'get a return' within three months, whilst in their recollection of working in Scotland, it is apparent that sufficient time was given for this individual to achieve 'grip' and 'immersion'.

## Evaluation and audit

The tendency towards interventionism in policy-making is closely connected to the growth of what Engle Merry (2016) refers to as 'indicator culture', a technique of bureaucratic government that is governed through evaluation and audit. The more tightly defined an activity, such as a programmatic intervention, the more straightforward it is to monitor progress and outcomes. Walsh (1995: 136) has suggested that the more it has relied on contracting out, the more the UK state has become 'evaluative', with monitoring and evaluating the success of contractors' activities over time becoming a core function of government. Evaluation can be a tool of 'political insurance', ensuring that policymakers remain seen to be 'doing something' while shifting the blame for any flaws or failures onto those contracted to implement policies (Dahler-Larsen, 2019: 75). As Walsh (1995: 25) puts it, 'we must in the end trust somebody and, in the evaluative state, trust has increasingly come to lie with the auditor and inspector'.

A strikingly consistent theme in our interviews with those involved in the delivery or management of violence reduction activities was the extent to which they felt governed and constrained by the pressures of evaluation and audit.

Where evaluation and audit wield authority, and organizational trust is low, 'elaborate and wasteful games of compliance distract professional attention' (Power, 2007: 335). This lack of trust and these wasteful games were particularly evident in our interviews with grassroots and community-based organizations—such as in this quote from a London-based youth worker:

> [What] I really hate is where it's so prescriptive - this like 9,000 page dossier of all the effects that something is going to have indirectly....We had really good youth workers where we were growing up.... People you get to know and really embed themselves within the lives of the community [who are] there then when things happen.... People from the community who do stuff like that don't have these huge industrial machines and don't actually now get the same capacity to deliver [activities].... Everything's become ... let's re-evaluate, re-pilot ... what really reduces violence is people on the ground. (Youth Worker 3, England)

The phrase 'huge industrial machines' mentioned here refers to large, corporate style organizations operating within the violence reduction 'industry', who are able to expend considerable resources producing what this community leader referred to as a '9,000 page dossier' to evidence how well their specific, 'prescriptive' interventions are working. Within the 'evaluative' culture of the English violence reduction policy field, such 'dossiers' can carry substantial weight, bolstering the legitimacy, credibility, and 'market position' of the organizations that are able to produce them. The scepticism of this community leader is palpable: rather than a rigorous analysis of an organization's work, the 'dossier' they describe sounds more like a sophisticated marketing pamphlet. By contrast, youth workers supporting their own communities, in which they are 'embedded', have difficulties securing resources, as they lack the capacity required to 're-evaluate' or 're-pilot', and thus to win contracts and funding. The legitimacy they maintain within their community, or in the street field, does not translate into meaningful currency within the marketized policy field. As Doherty and De St Croix (2019) put it, 'the way [youth work] practice is recognized and valued by those most deeply involved is [too often] disconnected from the way it

is required to be measured, monitored and evaluated'. Youth workers and community leaders are incentivized to speak the language of the policy field and adhere to its logic, engaging in 'games of compliance' to secure credibility and contracts. This limits the extent to which they can mobilize their practice wisdom and their understanding of the street field to galvanize change within the policy-making sphere; thereby creating non-conducive conditions for the cultivation of transformative 'plural actors'.

Community-embedded organizations which do succeed in winning contracts to deliver violence reduction activity can struggle with the pressure from government agencies to comply with intensive evaluation regimes. One leader of a London youth charity stated this point strongly:

> The work that we did on the ground was brilliant, but the monitoring and evaluation side of it was just not worth it … we thought the organizations they funded were trusted organizations…[but] the stuff that they tried to put in place [for evaluation] during that time, it was draining … we were continuously shocked at what was expected of us, as well as delivering … as well as doing the actual work.… Nothing ever came out of [the evaluation]. It just took up a lot of our time. (Community Leader 4, England)

There is a notable contrast here between 'the actual work' and the 'monitoring and evaluation'—the suggestion being that, rather than serving to enhance the work, the evaluation detracted from it, certainly appearing to be as 'wasteful' for this participant. Striking, too, is the discussion of trust: they were 'shocked' by the intensity of the evaluation particularly because they had thought they were a 'trusted organization', an assumption which was challenged by the degree of scrutiny they received. Apparent here is what Dahler-Larsen (2019) calls the 'contestability differential' within evaluations—in political cultures which valorize evaluation as a key course of legitimacy, agencies or activities under evaluation are framed as questionable and disputable, whilst the evaluators, and the evaluation itself, are perceived as relatively incontestable. Community organizations engaging with the English violence reduction policy field appear to feel the effects of this.

Relationships of trust are not only consequential at the level of commissioners and community organizations, of course. Trust is arguably all the more crucial in the relationships formed between those delivering violence reduction activities and the people they are seeking to support, including

young people in particularly complex and risky situations. Within the evaluative paradigm, these complexities can become 'subordinated to outcome indicators' (De St Croix et al., 2020: 467). Organizations can feel pressure to collude in the 'datafication' of young people, in a manner which risks jeopardizing their trust (ibid). Concern was expressed about this both by those running small community organizations and those managing major, large-scale programmes from within local government agencies:

> The very personal information that [the violence reduction commissioner] were asking for about our young people was disgusting. . . . Like, why do you need this information? We don't even have that information about our young people. You're asking us to engage young people that could be going down the wrong track and you're asking them very personal questions. We don't ask them those questions. We don't need to know. So, I think that was a massive sticking point for us with that. . . . So, the sort of data collection side of things, I mean, I think we pushed back quite a bit at that point. (Community Leader 1, England)

> That's what we're feeling in our project, is the requirements of the evaluation are pretty significant in terms of what data we are requiring from this cohort who are understandably really suspicious. . . . [From their standpoint] "I'm used to being surveilled by you. I've got the police stopping me every time I leave my house." All of that distrust stuff we're . . . yeah, up against really. (Social Work Leader 2, England)

Compliance with funding arrangements requires adherence to the evaluative culture of the policy field, and complicity in the 'datafication' of young people. The policy field can 'pull' agencies and individual practitioners towards 'watching over' young people, as much as, or more than, 'working with' them (Wroe and Lloyd, 2020). Whilst community organizations may feel they 'don't need to know' certain information about young people, and local government agencies may likewise recognize the 'suspicion' that receives from young people, they are under pressure to service the audit culture. Such 'datafication' pressures are carried down the audit trail. Often, commissioners' requests and requirements of those they fund are dictated by their own funding arrangements—VRUs, for instance, are obliged to collect information to feed into their own evaluation and audit by their major funder, the Home Office. In turn, the Home Office reports to the Treasury on its spending. 'Games of compliance', then, occur at every level,

but are perhaps most treacherous when they endanger the trust between young people and those seeking to help them avoid or desist from violence.

Those involved in the direct delivery of violence reduction activity drew attention not only to the cultural imperatives of the policy field which they are compelled to navigate, but also the cultural and professional backgrounds of those overseeing evaluation processes. Essentially, they highlighted a dearth of 'plural actors' within the policy field: those making violence reduction policy, governing violence reduction contracts, all too often lack frontline professional experience of working with young people—let alone personal experience of the street field. As Hood (1991: 6) argues, the managerialist movement in public services values generic management expertise over professional craft. This was conveyed forcefully by a violence reduction project lead we interviewed, who had an extensive background in youth justice. They described the attitude of one particular funder as 'we've given you the money, this is what we expect you to achieve', and suggested that—especially at more senior levels of the funding organization—'I don't feel like there's necessarily people who have got experience of what this world really looks like away from a piece of paper' (Youth Justice Leader 1, England). Among those professional managers and evaluators acting as arbiters of effective violence reduction practice, then, there are some whose understanding of the issue derives largely from research and training—'pieces of paper'—as opposed to practice experience. Far from plural actors, such figures can act as 'guardians' of the policy field, 'uphold[ing] the space's nomos and exclud[ing] unqualified or unwelcome actors from it through boundary-making processes' (Liu, 2021: 132).

There can thus be a collision between—on the one hand—an abstract model of evidence-based practice, informed by particular forms of research, evaluation and audit, and—on the other—what has been termed 'knowledge-based practice' (Glasby, 2011: 89), grounded in the 'practice wisdom' (Klein and Bloom, 1995) of those who have occupied frontline roles. As a result, the project lead described the need to protect their staff from the pressures of evaluation and audit:

> [I've had to say] we can't just do this because actually right now [the workers have] just had two young people die and the last thing on their priority list is to give you some piece of paperwork. And just helping [funders and evaluators] to understand on the ground what that looks like, in that moment, but for the weeks after that when there's been a serious incident. So, I feel like we've … insulated, provided a protective

layer... we've had to think really carefully around how we prevent [the evaluation] from impacting on practice. (Youth Justice Leader 1, England)

Notably, this participant is the third quoted in this section to use the phrase 'on the ground', a term which suggests a vertical boundary between those 'on the ground' working directly with young people, and those occupying more lofty positions who govern monitoring and evaluation processes scrutinizing those 'below'. This project lead's reference to creating a 'protective layer' and to 'insulation' suggests that they work to shore up the boundary between the policy field 'on high' and the world of frontline practitioners 'on the ground': they thereby act as another form of 'guardian'—'defend[ing] the boundaries of a social space against the intrusion of actors from other spaces' (Liu, 2021: 132). Given the tensions, stresses and complexities of the work undertaken by the youth workers that they support, they seek to minimize the 'intrusion' of audit and evaluation pressures into their work.

This participant went on to explain that the need for this 'protective layer' was all the greater due to the 'double whammy' of monitoring experienced by those delivering their particular project. In this project, they were subject both to the requirements of the relevant statutory inspectorate and, in parallel, to the evaluation stipulations of the funding body. Pressure from inspectorates (such as Ofsted for education and social care) is endemic in the 'audit society' (Power, 2007), but with austerity policies sharply limiting resources, agencies even in local authorities are increasingly required to enter the world of competitively-secured external funding arrangements, which bring an additional set of audit and evaluation requirements.

Thus, the imperatives of audit and evaluation within the English violence reduction policy field accentuate the demarcation between those governing and those delivering violence reduction activity, as well as creating additional challenges for those frontline workers seeking to establish relationships with people in communities. As such, these imperatives can sharpen and 'thicken' the boundaries between the social spaces of violence reduction: between the policy, practitioner, and street fields in particular. Where in Scotland during its violence reduction policy 'revolution', the boundaries of the policy field appeared permeable and dynamic, the equivalent social spaces in England appear relatively ossified and rigid, governed by formal agreements and administrative processes.

## Comparing policy fields

As has been argued, the principles of New Public Management continue to have a substantial influence on the shape that the public health approach has taken south of Hadrian's Wall. In particular, competitive contracting, the rise of interventionism, and 'audit cultures' of evaluation have come to characterize how violence reduction is done within England and Wales. In this section, returning to key themes from chapters 5 and 6, we contrast the prevailing logics of Westminster and regional English policy fields with those of Scottish policy fields. Pulling threads together from this and earlier chapters, we draw out how differences between these policy fields have resulted in two neighbouring nations pursuing two profoundly divergent versions of the public health approach to violence reduction.

## Market organization and innovation

As discussed in chapters 4 and 5, the public health approach to violence in Scotland was driven by institutional change and innovation within and across public sector bodies. In England, the design and delivery of violence reduction activity appears to be arranged more through 'market organization' (Esmark, 2020: 126). As argued, the change in violence reduction policies and practice in Scotland resulted from what we term a symbolic revolution, involving a perceived crisis, the emergence of new leaders, and the subsequent building of a movement for change that reframed the terms of debate, drawing on storytelling and the 'deep story' of Scottish identity. By contrast, in England, market-making and contracting have created a more fragmented and competitive field, in which agencies' capital is determined by market position, and a greater proportion of relationships between agencies is governed by contract rather than by more collaborative forms of network. In Esmark's terms (2020: 126), the hallmarks of Scottish violence reduction involved 'network organization' characterized by 'interdependence, reflexivity, negotiation, communication and dialogue', while the 'market organization' associated with 'independence, competition, contracts' is more representative of the picture south of the border. Observing high-level policy meetings in London, it is notable how frequently we witnessed senior stakeholders—for instance high-ranking police or Directors of Children's Services—describe violence reduction activities in the city as inherently confusing, verging on 'anarchy'. From their perspective, a

perennial difficulty was knowing who is commissioning which violence reduction activities, where, how, and why.

Sir Peter Housden, then-Permanent Secretary for the Scottish Government, who had previously worked in Westminster policy-making, critiqued the marketized model for delivering public goods in a public speech which was later published in an academic journal (Housden, 2014). Drawing direct contrasts between Westminster and Scottish policy-making, he questioned the virtues of pursuing new and better approaches through 'specific grants with high-stakes audit' (or 'penny packets'), instead advocating for innovation to be 'driven organically by organizations and networks with the requisite ambition, curiosity and skills' (Housden, 2014: 71). He suggested that the latter was more prevalent within Scottish policy-making, whilst the former characterized the Whitehall approach, particularly due to the power of 'New Public Management in England' (ibid). Though it has been suggested that this binary contrast is overdrawn (see e.g. Cairney and St Denny, 2020: 77), and Housden himself made clear he was painting the comparison in broad strokes, it does appear to tally with the perspectives of those directly involved with English violence reduction, as explored in this chapter.

The issue of trust, however, may be instructive in analysing divergence in the implementation of public health approaches in Scotland and England. Researchers have for example identified a marked difference between the UK and Scottish governments in relation to these issues of organizational relationships and trust. Greer and Jarman (2008: 173–178) describe the UK government as having 'low trust in providers', preferring to rely upon market mechanisms reinforced by rigid audit and evaluation. Indeed, prominent architects of the New Labour Government's marketization agenda explicitly critiqued the notion of trust as an organizing principle within public services, as compared to the superior merits of competition (e.g. Le Grand, 2007). By contrast, Greer and Jarman (2008: 278) argue that the Scottish Government has a more collaborative approach, forming relationships with policy partners, demonstrating a 'high degree of trust in the professionalism of providers' (c.f. Cairney and St Denny, 2020: 69–77).

Our interview data suggests a strong degree of resonance with this comparison in relation to recent violence reduction policymaking. The relationship between the Scottish Government and the early SVRU, for instance, was characterized by a high degree of trust and minimal accountability, when compared to the archetypal contractual relationships being formed in England today between violence reduction commissioners and contractors.

For Lane (2000), this is a central marker of New Public Management: the prevalence of short-term, transactional contracts, marked by low trust and extensive monitoring, rather than longer-term, relational contracts, marked by trust and flexibility.

## The 'cold charisma' of numbers

As discussed in chapters 4 and 5, the movement towards a public health approach to violence reduction within Scottish national policy-making was facilitated by a range of factors. The public health approach accrued legitimacy in Scotland over a period of decades from the 1980s, aided by national policy changes, cultural shifts within key agencies, and conducive political conditions. One particularly crucial factor, though, was an aptitude and an audience for storytelling within the Scottish policy field. Stories and storytelling, enlivened by the 'charismatic authority' of storytellers, played an important role in galvanizing the wide-ranging movement for change which culminated in the adoption of the public health approach as a guiding philosophy for violence reduction in Scotland. Agencies such as the SVRU became invested with 'institutional charisma' (Bourdieu, 2017). Through all this, in Petzke's terms, 'the perceptions of legitimate practice' were 'reordered'; these policy entrepreneurs 'fundamentally restructure[d] the ways in which authority and legitimacy [was] assigned' (Petzke, 2022: 491).

  Within Westminster policy-making, and public policy-making within England more broadly, the cultures and capitals of policy fields differ from the 'territorial policy field' in Scotland. In particular, as opposed to charismatic storytelling as a canonical source, our study suggested that the 'cold charisma of numbers' (Mau, 2019: 13) wielded greater legitimacy and authority. Whilst Scottish policy-making drew in and was influenced by the compellingly communicated 'practice wisdom' of figures such as John Carnochan and Karen McCluskey, policy-making at both the UK government level and more local levels within England appear more affected by the 'seductions of quantification' (Engle Merry, 2016). Reflecting the relative strength of New Public Management principles within UK and English policy fields, policymakers exhibit a 'preoccupation with quantification, measurement and objective evidence as the foundation of political authority' (Esmark, 2020: 173). Authority rests with those able to wield 'objective evidence' to legitimize their ideas and approaches—with

quantitative data in particular enjoying what Standring has labelled an 'exalted position' (Standring, 2017: 231).

Though statistical data played an important role in the stories mobilized within the Scottish violence reduction policy 'revolution', such statistics made a quite different contribution to that south of the border. In Scotland, violent crime statistics were used to galvanize action by pointing to a violence crisis: both to indicate the extent of violence, and to illustrate that the existing policy paradigm was not working. Years later, statistics were used to draw attention to declining violence, and to the effectiveness of the work delivered through the broad-ranging public health approach policy movement. In England, by contrast, our study suggests a much more granular mobilization of quantitative data as 'insignia of legitimacy' (Petzke, 2022: 488): each agency seeking to establish itself as a viable actor within the marketized world of violence reduction is required to deploy substantial numerical evidence as a justification for its work, and as a route to competitive advantage. The world of English violence reduction resembles a complex marketplace, consisting of a complicated 'nexus of contracts', involving a variety of commissioning bodies, national charities, community organizations, evaluation consultancies, and research agencies. Within this world, symbolic capital accrues to those best able to craft and to deploy legitimate forms of evidence.

These tendencies reflect the growing prominence of evidence-based policy-making since the turn of the century, galvanized initially by New Labour 'truth junkies' (Sullivan, 2011), and subsequently accelerated under successive Conservative governments. This belief in rigorous numerical evidence as the cornerstone for policy has been described as 'scientization' (Stone, 2017), and as an attempt to 'do politics like science' (Jones and Whitehead, 2018). Central to this is a de-personalized vision of political legitimacy. Indeed, in an influential 2013 paper for the Department of Education calling for more evidence-led policy-making in government, Ben Goldacre explicitly contrasted his 'what works' approach with a reliance on 'eminence, charisma, and personal experience' (Goldacre, 2013; quoted in Pearce and Raman, 2014: 388). This 'what works' mantra is a guiding principle for the Youth Endowment Fund—a cornerstone of violence reduction policy-making in England and Wales, as discussed in chapter 6.

The production of a fifty page quantitative evaluation report, replete with charts and diagrams, is as much the assertion of a narrative as is the storytelling of a charismatic leader. It is an artful meaning-making practice, tailored to a particular audience, embedded within a specific field, to achieve

a desired result. As Engle Merry (2016: 1–4) puts it: 'numbers convey an aura of objective truth and scientific authority despite the extensive interpretive work that goes into their construction … [they] reflect the social and cultural worlds of the actors and organizations that create them and the regimes of power within which they are formed' (Engle Merry, 2016: 1–4). As explored in this chapter, the 'social and cultural worlds' and the 'regimes of power' shaping English violence reduction are marked by a competitive marketplace of evidence and narrative. Agencies wield evaluation reports and research reviews to shore up their claims to political authority and funding, and draw selectively on policy narratives that appear to forward a particular political agenda. Numbers secure contracts. Russell and Greenhalgh (2011: 62) have argued that, within the discourses of evidence-based policy-making, the promise of translating rigorous evidence into transformed services is 'sacred', yet conceals a messier, more complex, 'profane' political reality. Similarly critiquing the idea that evidence-based policy-making can somehow circumvent politics, Cairney and St Denny (2020: 66) highlight that such policy-making will always entail 'major political choices about what evidence counts and who should gather and use it'.

If the rise of the public health approach in Scotland amounted to a symbolic revolution, through which key figures and organizations were able to alter the regime of legitimacy and authority within the Scottish policy field, the story of the public health approach south of the border has been one of divergence. Rather than being a vessel for the reshaping of policy-making practices, the implementation of the public health approach within Westminster and regional English policy fields has demonstrated the continued potency of New Public Management principles within English politics. The symbolic economy of these policy fields remains dominated by the currency of quantitative evidence, crafted by policy entrepreneurs into compelling narratives, enabling the competitive accrual of legitimacy, authority, and contracts.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored the philosophy and practice of approaches rooted in New Public Management, as a means of apprehending the 'canonical sources' central to the implementation of public health approaches to violence reduction in England and Wales. Interviews with English violence reduction policymakers, managers, commissioners, and practitioners

revealed the significance of three connected imperatives: (1) navigating the competitive violence reduction marketplace to secure contracts; (2) operating through isolable interventions; and (3) negotiating evaluation and audit cultures. These imperatives display considerable elective affinity, deriving as they do from shared origins in a family of policy paradigms derived from New Public Management (Hood, 1991). Together, they shape the terrain of England's violence reduction field. For those agencies delivering violence reduction activities in this field, securing contracts over competitors is crucial to success or to survival. Market position, in turn, is dictated by agencies' ability to wield authoritative forms of evidence, and to demonstrate appropriate evidence-gathering capacity. This requires the adoption of approaches which are adequately well-defined as to be contracted, and packaged in such a way as to be evaluated. Those policymakers operating at more of a distance from direct delivery are compelled to master a parallel game, curating funding markets and commissioning activities which enable the production of demonstrable success, proven by legitimate evidence, enriched by the 'magic' of captivatingly transformative interventions.

The two jurisdictions are not characterized by simplistically dichotomous distinction. Some of our Scottish interviewees ruminated on difficulties with funding models, and with the challenges of evidencing frontline work, for instance. And in the English violence reduction field, of course, rival imperatives, alternative drivers, and competing constraints are present in the form of 'agonistic' interplay common to the policy field (Goodman, Page and Phelps, 2017), bolstering the efforts of those who wish to resist these imperatives. Similarly, storytelling holds some sway in English violence reduction, just as the persuasive power of numbers is apparent within Scotland. But in examining the agonistic development of these two fields since the turn of the century—the collision of interests within them, the swirl of contending ideas and cultures throughout them—it is possible to draw broad conclusions about the predominant forces in each. To state the comparison in broad terms, the Scottish policy field is a small, networked, relational community, while the English field by contrast is more depersonalized and marketized. Within the latter, different agents are incentivized to compete, seeking to maximize their symbolic capital through the mobilization of evidential narratives, and their economic capital through the successful securing of funding contracts.

The evolution of public health approaches to violence reduction thus looks different in the Scottish and English jurisdictions. Despite the discursive narrative of policy movement, this is not a case of simple policy

transfer. At the level of policy action, the public health approach to violence reduction in England could only be implemented in alignment with 'the grain of existing institutional regimes' (Rosbrook-Thompson, 2019: 40). In particular, its form seems to have developed through the prism of new public governance imperatives, which effectively facilitate certain specific hallmarks of the public health approach—such as evidence-based interventions—at the expense of others—such as broader, preventative institutional change. As has been evident throughout this chapter, practitioners and managers wrestle with the imperatives of the English national violence reduction field, as they are manifest in the priorities and directives of power-holders 'above' them.

In the following chapter, our lens shifts to 'zoom in' on community-level experiences in Glasgow and London. In exploring these perspectives, we seek to juxtapose the ideas, imperatives and priorities of both Scottish and English violence reduction policymakers with the lived realities on the streets of Glasgow and London. Change can sweep through Scotland's public services through the power of storytelling, Westminster politicians can avow their commitment to replicate this apparent revolution in England and Wales, but, ultimately, interpersonal violence is experienced in communities, neighbourhoods, streets, and homes. It is to these daily, lived realities that we now turn.

# THERE'S HOPE, AYE

Hearing how much you've all been through and seeing how you can be treated in the school, I sometimes wonder how you manage to keep going. And not just keep going but stay funny, kind and caring. You'll hate me saying this, but you all inspire me and give me hope.

I've been watching all the films you've made these last few days and noticed you talk about hope as well. At the end of the OG film there's a great bit where the illustrator draws a picture of a house in the hills, a stream running down from it, smoke coming up from the chimney and hills behind. As she draws you just hear your voice: 'if I had the chance to move away I would, wouldn't be the way it is here with all different schemes. I would move tae the countryside of Scotland, with the hills and all that, oot the way from everybody man'. It's sad in a way that you can't imagine a good future where you are, but it still makes me smile every time.

The film with the writer of the book *The Young Team*, Graeme Armstrong, was something else. Decorating that old bench with menchies in the middle of a pure white TV studio, covering it in leaves and vapes and Buckfast bottles, what a total laugh. Then Graeme coming in and sitting on it, answering all your questions about drugs and violence and gang life and changing your story. My favourite bit is when he turns the tables and asks you a few questions about your lives. He asks you, what are your hopes for the future? You say a job, a family, a house, get away from violence. You say there's hope, aye. But you have to rely on yourself, school doesn't help. You say you were excluded from school, shipped off to college, nobody cared.

My proudest moment in our whole journey was when you presented all your work in front of the whole school and teachers. You each stood up and introduced one thing—film, rap, boardgame—and the feeling in the room was unbelievable. The work is all amazing and everyone loved it, but even more important was you all standing up and owning it, owning the room like you belong here after all. The bit where you talked about being excluded hit deep.

I spoke to one of the year heads after and it was like a light had gone on. She had joined the school after you lost your friend, and she said at the time she just wanted you out and away from other kids. But now looking back she regrets that and sees it's not the right approach. You did that, you changed her mind.

The last film I watched was more recent, where one of you was interviewed about our work together. I could barely hold it together because you talked about the experience in a way I hadn't heard before. You say your head was still in the game, violence and that, dealing with the loss of our pal. You say our heads were all scrambled. Life was really hard, but the group was my escape. Started at 10% and went up and up. Now sorted 100%. He asks you what advice you'd give to folk working with young people, and you say time, show them time and show them love.

# 8
# Symbolic Revolution and the Street Field

## Introduction

Highly visible, street-based groups of young people, engaging in crime or violent conflict, have been reported in spaces of 'advanced marginality' (Wacquant, 2008) throughout the world (Dowdney, 2007) and in many cases these forms of identification have long historical antecedents, with marked continuities over time and space. This has led to conceptualizations, drawing on Bourdieu, of a 'street field' in which criminal actors enter into a struggle for resources in the form of 'street capital' (Sandberg, 2008). As in other field environments, however, the 'rules of the game' within the street field are subject to change (Bourdieu, 2017). Criminologists have, for example, pointed to a range of external causes for change in the nature and texture of 'road capitals' (Bakkali, 2022) within the street field—including technological developments. Ilan (2015), for example, discusses the phenomenon of 'online reppin' in which YouTube and social media become sites for one-upmanship and rivalry that can spill over into the streets. Where the drivers of street violence among young people could once have been found in neighbourhood disputes or gang rivalries, the roots of such conflicts now exist across virtual and physical boundaries. Social media can act as a 'force multiplier' (Yar, 2013: 11) that transforms street violence (Stuart, 2020) from traditional territorial disputes to more complex and fluid escalations and flashpoints (Urbanik and Haggerty, 2018).

Previous chapters have sought to compose a comparative analysis of the evolution of public health approaches in Scotland and England, applying Bourdieu's concept of symbolic revolution to the two nations' respective

policy fields. Important as these comparisons are for apprehending the potential of the public health approach, and conditions propitious for its success, there is a danger in looking from the sole perspective of policy actors. The street field and policy field can be like two tectonic plates, characterized in one moment by passive coexistence, and in the next by friction, disruption, or rupture. As Liu suggests, relationships can morph from being 'oppositional'—in tension with one another—to 'symbiotic', involving mutual exchange and connection (Liu, 2021). The altering relations between policy and street fields depend on the activities undertaken by actors within each, who can marshal the boundaries between them, or act as 'brokers', who can build connections and facilitate exchange (Liu, 2021).

In this chapter, we train attention on the street fields of Glasgow and London, exploring the changing ways in which Glasgow and London communities struggle to obtain 'the conditions of a life worth living' (Renaut, 2017: 110). Throughout, we draw upon our interviews and focus groups with young people and the frontline practitioners tasked with their care and education. Rather than separating analysis of our field sites in Glasgow and London, as in earlier chapters, here we bring them together. As Brangan asserts, avoidance of binarized accounts of similarity or difference requires 'a combination of grounded methods' (Brangan, 2023: 935). In what follows we seek to ground our analysis in the life-worlds of young people, as they navigate the street fields they dwell within, and in the perspectives of the community and youth workers seeking to address the neighbourhoods' needs. By centring the voices of communities and frontline professionals, we seek to elucidate the complex relationship between the violence reduction policy field and the ambiguities of the street field, as they are manifest in the cities of Glasgow and London.

The chapter is set out in three parts. In the first, we seek to build on and extend existing accounts of the contemporary 'street field' by grounding analysis in Bourdieu's later work on social suffering (Bourdieu et al., 1999) and subsequent theoretical developments (e.g. Kleinman, Das and Lock, 1997; Charlesworth, 2001; Das et al., 2001; Frost and Hoggett, 2008; Renault, 2017). In the second, we explore the everyday understandings of young people and youth workers of the changing dynamics of violence within the street field, drawing attention to both territorial and technological concerns. In the third, we move on to discuss the changing relations between policy and street fields in Scotland and England. The symbolic revolution in violence reduction achieved in Scotland—as described in chapters 4 and 5—relied upon the work of 'plural actors' (Lahire, 2011) who

were able to occupy a 'space between fields' (Eyal, 2013). These 'brokers at the boundary' built connections and enabled exchanges of ideas, perspectives and concerns across fields (Liu, 2021: 133), establishing a degree of symbiosis between them. But as Liu (2021: 128) emphasizes, the space between fields is subject to change. Different social spaces can always 'evolve autonomously for an extended period' and thereby 'drift apart': where once there was ample 'fuzzy zones' of overlap and commonality between fields, and a high degree of mutual receptiveness, there can grow sharper distinction, and greater rigidity. We thus raise questions about the extent to which, in either Glasgow or London, the policy field remains sufficiently connected with and attentive to the street field.

## Entering the street field

As discussed in chapter 3, the community case studies in both Glasgow and London involved interviews and observations with youth workers and young people, many of whom spoke of chronic financial struggle, and the consequences of inequalities in a way that resonated with Lansley's description of 'extractive capitalism' (Lansley, 2022): a mode of political economy dominated by the interests of those with the greatest wealth, characterized by the exploitation and structural exclusion of those with the least. Despite the much-vaunted reductions in violence in Glasgow, those living and working in both Glasgow and London portrayed strikingly similar images of material suffering. This was portrayed in stark terms—describing areas as 'dumping grounds', or 'a long time forgotten' (Frontline Youth Worker 10, Glasgow).

In both cities, we heard from youth and community workers of struggles to meet the basic needs of local communities, as neighbourhood resources stretched and needs continued to grow. In many cases, this was connected directly to policies of austerity, which resulted in the thoroughgoing erosion of municipal and community provision (Blyth, 2013; Seymour, 2014; Cooper and Whyte, 2017). In both settings, youth workers and young people reported an absence of what Currie has called 'essential institutions of care, nurturance and opportunity' (2020: 15) such as youth centres. Youth workers in Glasgow reported on the closure of youth centres, and the stretched nature of those that remain open. As one commented: 'I don't know how many, like, youth clubs that are running at capacity. Can't take anybody else on, because they've not got the money for the staff' (Frontline

Youth Worker 6, Glasgow). Similar sentiments were reflected in London. As one community leader reflected: 'For the last ten, twelve years we've had austerity, which has ripped our youth services apart. Lack of youth services, lack of youth workers, mentors have gone, youth clubs have gone' (Community Leader 2, England). Echoing this sentiment, one youth worker reflected on changes in his home community: 'this youth club shut down first, in 2011.... Then they shut [centre], shut down it must have been in 2013. And then after that it was just downhill, that we had nothing. We had nothing. There hasn't been a youth club ever since 2013' (Frontline Youth Worker 1, London).

Whilst austerity had reduced the availability of community-building provision and social infrastructure, gentrification had deepened inequalities and divisions in both London (Atkinson, 2020) and Glasgow (Paton, 2014). As studies have documented, those who cannot afford to stay experience either direct or indirect displacement (Butcher and Dickens, 2016). Such residents are made to feel the objects of abstract, opaque, but imperious economic forces, diminishing their agency and fostering a peculiar sense of loss (see Frost and Hoggett, 2008: 447). Amongst participants, experiences of exclusion and displacement were common. One Glasgow community worker described their neighbourhood, a traditionally working-class neighbourhood that was increasingly packaged toward affluent incomers, as 'one big coffee house' (Young Person 1, Glasgow). In London, one young person described the corrosive effect of gentrification on sense of community:

> What it was then and what it is now, it's completely different . . . I mean like there was more of a like… there was more like a community. However, because of how gentrification's happened over the years … property prices and stuff like that and like how much rent is now and even on the outskirts and it's like that community's not there anymore. (Young Person 6, London)

Against the backdrop of these experience of inequality, in both cities we heard of the reliance of young people on the 'choice of necessity' (Charlesworth, 2001: 53) through engagement with the illicit economy of the 'street field'. As Shammas and Sandberg suggest, much like the policy field the street field is composed of boundaries, differentiated positions, effects, and resources (Shammas and Sandberg, 2016). Unlike the policy field, however, the forms of capital and distinction within the street field stand in

opposition to the bureaucratic field of the state, involving behaviours that are criminalized. As one London-based young person reported: 'people selling drugs to be able to pay the bills basically. Not because they feel that they have to, it's just … I mean, not because they want to, like to glorify it or whatever, it was literally just to survive' (Young Person 3, London). Similar sentiments were expressed in Glasgow. According to one young person: 'when you do grow up, and you should know better, but it's money, it's a source of income, and it puts food on the table. When some people can work, like so many hours, like fifty hours a week, and probably earn less than some drug dealers, or whatever. So, it's crazy' (Young Person 2, Glasgow). In a consumer-driven society, the choice between being, as one young person put it 'financially dead' (Young Person 1, London), and involvement in illicit economies is perhaps no choice at all (Hayward, 2004).

Material suffering, struggles to maintain community provision, and gentrification all contribute to an eroded sense of community, and what Frost and Hoggett (2008: 448) have called 'withdrawal from connectedness'. One Glasgow community worker described this as 'a sense that we don't belong to each other', and another as like being 'visitors within our own community', particularly due to intergenerational fracturing (Frontline Youth Worker 4, Glasgow). As he continued, 'there's not that kind of elders within these communities who would maybe have lived there for twenty, thirty plus years, and they knew wee Mary up the road and they knew his son and they knew that one, that doesn't really exist anymore' (Frontline Youth Worker 4, Glasgow). London respondents suggested a similar decline in community-building spaces and events:

> Certainly the spaces in which communities can come together, it's getting harder and harder I would say … the young people that I work with, their family history and ancestry and close communities have always been in some sense waging … like, had a war waged against them by the state … the economy in collaboration with the state, so it's nothing new in that sense. (Youth Worker 6, London)

Evident in this account is what Renault (2017: 123) refers to as the 'fragilization' of social supports, and Das et al., (2001: 1) as the 'slow erosion of community'. Those seeking to alleviate the degradation and heightened isolation of marginalized communities do so in a remedial, compensatory mode, working to counteract the 'soft knife' of exclusionary policies (Das et al., 2001: 1). As evident from the community worker quoted, there are

doubts about the extent to which the policy field is connected into these lived realities, and—certainly—there is scepticism about whether the policy field is responsive to them.

In both Glasgow and London, material poverty was reported as an entry point to a market that promised not only financial stability but status and prestige. As in the licit economy, debt was reported as a tool of social control and oppression. As one Glasgow-based youth worker put it:

> Where is a twelve-year-old getting the money to finance two, three grams of cocaine? So, [older dealers] put them into debt ... they now kind of have them to be able to go and do ... their bidding, whether it is to sell amongst their peers, whatever it may be. And it's a never-ending cycle. That young person is never getting themselves out of that debt, it's just not happening. (Community Leader 1, Glasgow)

This chronic economic struggle causes tensions and strains for young people and families but also adds to the futility felt by those working in communities, whose role is 'compensating' for the 'inert violence' of the economic order (Bourdieu, 1999). Such forms of street level bureaucracy, Bourdieu notes, 'have been radically transformed by the substitution of direct aid to individuals for older forms of support in the form of access to services' (Bourdieu et al., 1999: 184). A commonality of tone was notable in our interviews with Glaswegian and London 'street level bureaucrats': alongside compassionate concern, there was a sense of foreboding. These two Glasgow-based practitioners, for instance, contrasted their future-oriented anxieties with the necessary presentism of those they support:

> People are going into real tough times ... and it's a consequence of the poverty trap, it's a consequence of, you know, lack of opportunity, jobs being hard to find, people seeing no way out. And I think that's impacting a lot of youngsters. I think they're seeing hard times ahead with no real light at the horizon. It worries me. (SVRU Former Member 2, Glasgow)

> I do think poverty is huge and it's not just poverty of like money. It's poverty of opportunity. Poverty of aspirations. Poverty of just sort of life goals.... There's no long term. People are just living day to day and just trying their best to get by and young people growing up in those situations just that's what they see, that's what they know and that's the life that they will statistically go on to live. (Frontline Youth Worker 1, Glasgow)

These practitioners perceive a difference between their conception of time, and those they work with that reflects a fatalism rooted in an 'absolute uncertainty about the future' (Bourdieu et al., 1999: 185).

Though illicit drug economies are of course nothing new in London or Glasgow (Hobbs, 2013; Fraser, 2015), the combination of deepening material scarcity, eroded community connectedness, and stretched supportive services is heightening the vulnerability of younger people to being pulled or coerced into involvement in illicit economies. This is further evidenced by research and reports which show increased volatility within British drug markets, and their heightened prominence within street cultures (Hales, 2021). Reflecting alterations in the street field elsewhere (Fraser and Joe-Laidler, 2024), participants reported shifts in generational dynamics of drug markets, as through a combination of desperation, exploitation and insufficient safeguarding support, younger people are drawn into the drug economies in each city. Community workers discussed this with deep concern:

> I just think the longer we ignore this … the financial crisis at the moment is going to be worse than 2008 … I'm seeing poverty levels that I've never seen in twenty years, to be fair. And because of that I can only see the development of new business opportunities for drug dealers, latching onto weans [children]. (Community Leader 1, Glasgow)

> Younger people are seeing their parents struggle and feeling like well I've got to do something to help. That usually leads to trying to find ways to make money and naturally … as a young person there isn't a lot of opportunities to make money.… And there are olders in the area who I guess they have a sixth sense when young people, especially those on early, teenage are in desperate need. And they prey on those young people. (Young Person 2, London)

In London, youth workers situated the changing nature of the illicit economy in the context of wider patterns of urban inequality, with deep poverty placed amongst immense prosperity, the poor and the super-wealthy living 'chic by jowl' (Young, 1999). Exposure to visible wealth of others alters the character of material suffering, as one London young person commented: 'It's just hunger, it's poverty, it's just going home and not having certain things in the cupboard but the next man does, a man's driving this or he's got a nice car and this and that. It's just not equal, isn't it, so everybody's just after something and wanting somethin' (Young Person 1, London).

Whilst structural inequalities remained entrenched in both contexts, however, it was notable that the street economy remained dynamic, adjusting to new possibilities and constraints. In the following section, we move from the structural conditions of the field to the dynamics of change, exploring the ways in which technological and territorial changes are influencing patterns of life, and patterns of violence, in the two cities. In so doing, we do not relegate structural inequalities to the analytical background. As Bakkali emphasizes, such inequalities are 'entrenched in the fine grain experiences of those on the margins … a messy amalgamation of structural inequalities and contradictions operate continuously in their lives' (Bakkali, 2019: 1317 and 1329).

## Continuity and change

Changes to patterns of street-based interpersonal physical violence reflect alterations in street fields. Urbanik has for example detailed the changing logic of street-based drug markets in Toronto that emerged from a new generation of dealers ousting the 'OGs' (Urbanik, 2018), involving a peaceful transition that resulted in decreased levels of violence. These changes within field environments can be prompted by a range of factors. Grenfell and Hardy (2003), for example, documents the arrival of the avant garde movement within the field of art as a catalyst for a reimagination of the social value in the art world. In Janet Chan's influential study of the dynamics of change and resistance in police organizations (1996), she applies Bourdieu's framework to understand the contradictions that arise between on-the-job knowledge and administrative changes to the police field. In what follows, drawing on the voices and experiences of young people and youth workers, we assess both continuity and change in dynamics of violence within Glasgow's and London's street fields, as a means of assessing the extent to which current approaches to violence reduction are in step with current realities.

## Social media

One of the most significant changes in young people's socio-cultural milieu in Glasgow and London, as elsewhere, has been the social consequences of digital technology. Technological change has accelerated at an

unprecedented rate, resulting in a rapid breakdown of the boundary be-
tween digital and social lives (Caselli and Gilardoni, 2018). The very idea
of a separation between online and offline selves has been challenged, as
'real' and 'virtual' forms of sociality become increasingly entangled and
reconstructed according to the logic of social media (Hayward, 2010: 2).
Due to digitally enabled drug distribution on the 'Darknet' (Martin, 2014;
Coomber and Moyle, 2017), economically-motivated violence has shifted
from traditional territorial disputes to more complex and fluid escal-
ations and flashpoints (Urbanik and Haggerty, 2018). Where the drivers of
street violence among young people could once have been found in neigh-
bourhood disputes or gang rivalries, the roots of such conflicts now exist
across virtual and physical boundaries beyond the reach of place-based
approaches. As a result, public and policy concern over social media has
quickly outpaced the evidence-base, with recent concerns over youth vio-
lence and 'drill' rap music echoing long-standing popular fears over deviant
youth (Cohen, 1972; Fatsis, 2019). In the case study field sites, community
workers discussed the ubiquity of smartphone technology on the everyday
lives of young people:

> It's hard because social media, it's like, if a young person wakes up,
> what's the first thing they're going to do?...A young person now, the
> first thing they will do when they wake up, before their eyes have even
> opened fully, they pick up their phone, jump on Instagram, Snapchat or
> TikTok. (Youth Worker 1, London)

Fraser's (2015: 176) ethnographic work with the Langview Boys in Glasgow
found that their activities were defined by interactions on the streets, in
school and in one another's homes. There was pressure not to miss out on
anything that might have a bearing on the group, 'vandalise, to drink al-
cohol, to participate in every activity and so on: so as not to miss out on
anything that might have a bearing on status in the group'. With the ad-
vent of constant, real-time communications via social media, this feeling of
'FOMO' (Fear Of Missing Out) has been accelerated and amplified:

> The peer pressure to [be on socials], and the exclusion from your peer
> group is so massive, that young people wouldn't even consider [deleting
> accounts]. They just say, I can't do that. . . . Young people just feel the
> pressure to remain on social media to be representing a gang, if they're
> orientating around about gang violence, then that's where it begins.

> And they can do it from the comfort of their own bedroom.… Their instant access to each other is incredible. And how you intervene and how you, I suppose, create safety within these digital platforms.….. To quote or to paraphrase a kind of narrative that's continuously said to me from young people is to acknowledge they feel trapped on social media.… So, that's the role that kind of social media plays, and it's really, really difficult when you're doing intervention, because they're already on social media platforms, and they're telling you they feel trapped and no way will they leave that. (Frontline Youth Worker 4, Glasgow)

It is important to note, however, that effects of digital technology of street-based identifications was far from uniform. While some youth workers saw the impacts of social media as devastating, 'blown everything up', with the capacity to 'ignite beef and war', others saw social media more simply as a new tool through which to operationalize age-old cultural codes. As these youth workers from London discuss:

> It hasn't changed anything. That's what was happening before, what it has done it's just made it more visible to those of us that are on the periphery. So, I almost talk about it as it's a bit like underworld. If you're in that world you will see the lichens, you will see the vampires, but if you're not in that world, you're just walking down happy. (Youth Worker 2, London)

> I just think it makes it faster. I don't think it changes what the outcome would be, because for me, there'd be still phones, we'd still use a telephone box, things would still get arranged, people would still be able to commit violence whenever they wanted to. But I think the introduction of social media just means that you know where people are far quicker, and arranging certain things is a lot easier, right. So, I don't think it's changed violence, in that sense. (Youth Worker 14, London)

For young people interviewed regarding changing dynamics of violence, the digital realm was discussed as a somewhat ambiguous space, neither entirely local nor completely global. As Fraser and van Hellemont (2022) have argued, it is helpful to conceive of street culture through the lens of the 'mediascape' (Appadurai, 1997) that acts as a hinterland between online and offline identities. Young people spoke about the exchange of threats, hostilities and aggressive self-assertions on social media, conveying a

sense that it has become a 'digital field' of its own. Following Roudemetof's (2016), Fraser and van Hellemont (2020:12) argue that online interaction is defined not by hybridity but 'refraction' in which 'a new set of cultural products emerge that are composed of a meeting between elements of the local and the global but that create something new that is neither local nor global'. Online altercations, often expressed between individuals on their phones within their own homes, may have a kind of semi-autonomous relationship with on-the-street territorial tensions and hostilities. As these young people in Glasgow and London describe:

> You get pure on it and then you start arguing over Snapchat, two full schemes going at it . . . telling them your going to kill them and aw that, saying were gonna chop fuck out you . . . its no good man, its frightening . . . it all goes south dead quickly . . . " (The Four Wise Men, Glasgow)

> It's like, everyone wants to feel like a certain belonging and that . . . Social media is like the big driving force for it. Like, everyone's somebody. Everyone is trying to portray that they're somebody. Well literally most of these people are really nobodies. (Young Person 4, London)

These young people alluded to online posturing and pretence, and a deep sense of ambivalence within this digital field (see Stuart, 2020). As asserted identities and hostilities rapidly circulate, it is difficult to know how these symbolic exchanges may manifest in the physical world. Self-definitions and threats abound but with varying degrees of sincerity, irony, intent or flippancy. This may perhaps substantiate the recent work of Samanani (2022), focused on a particular social housing estate in London, which suggests that ambiguity is the predominant feature of the estate's youth culture: young people slide between 'commitment and disavowal'; blending and blurring 'street and "straight" styles, practices and networks' (Samanani, 2022: 66, 69). One more clear-cut impact of digital technology has, however, been the recasting of territorial identity.

## Territorialism and violence

For Fraser (2015), a 'street habitus' is forged through systematic marginality, in which territorial space becomes an indispensable asset for the construction of identity. As Wacquant notes, 'identification with one's place

of residence can assume exacerbated forms that reflect the closure of one's lived universe' (Wacquant, 2007: 271). As such, for Sandberg and Pederson, 'street habitus' can be 'conceptualised as the relatively permanent and sometimes unconscious dispositions of individuals committed to street culture'. It is the embodied practical sense that is seen in hypersensitivity to offences and frequent displays of violent potential (Sandberg and Pederson, 2011: 34; Ilan, 2013; Fraser, 2013, 2015).

In Glasgow, youth workers echoed the views of policy actors in pointing to the declining prevalence of community violence. Interviews conducted with youth practitioners living and working in areas identified in the early 2000s as violence 'hotspots' spoke consistently of a reduction in public forms of violence involving young people, particularly those involving group-based violence. During this period, participants emphasized a normalization of violence that is no longer present. As one youth worker stated, while violence in the city has not gone away, 'it's nothing compared to the way it was' (Frontline Youth Worker 3, Glasgow). Another, drawing direct comparison with the peak of violence in the early 2000s, noted, 'away back in 2003, you know, I would come in on a Monday… I would always have heard there'd been a stabbing over the weekend, if not a fatality within the city… I just am so happy that it's nowhere near as bad as it was then as it is now, you know, it's definitely got better' (Community Leader 1, Glasgow). Similarly, the following comments from community youth workers—one of whom was formerly involved in territorial 'gang' activity—are illustrative of this change:

> When I was involved in violence, if you were going for a gang fight, you had to go and wait at the place where you would gang fight, normally a spare bit of grass that would be … that would separate you and another housing scheme. And you would whistle and you would shout in the hope that another … the other gang would hear you and come down, and then there would be a running battle. Now it's not like that … and that's a direct consequence of social media. (Frontline Youth Worker 4, Glasgow)

> So, I seen it all. And walking to school, people used to shoot air rifles at us, and we used to have gang fights in the morning, after school, whatever else. And that was normalized, it was just normal behaviour. Nowadays, you see somebody getting stabbed and it's like, top news on BBC, it's like, in all the papers, it's all over social media. (Frontline Youth Worker 3, Glasgow)

Young adult participants similarly noted that the scale and nature of violence had changed from when they were growing up (in the early 2000s) to the present. Reflecting other accounts, they suggested violence used to be associated strongly with young people and territorial 'gang' activity, and that there was a scale and acceptance of this to be 'the norm'. Now, violence was seen to be a rarer occurrence either circumstantial and 'random', or related more specifically to drug markets. Territorialism was seen to be less of an issue for many young people now, who were more free to move between different territorial areas, with social media expanding social networks and loosening established boundaries within the 'street habitus'.

> Growing up in [area X], like, it was quite rough, and a lot of violence, like growing up as a kid … I just think it was normal to, like, walk down the street, and for there to be a fight on your left, and a fight on the right. Like, it was just normal, and you just walked past it.… But now it's kind of just like the odd kind of fight, you don't really see it as much now, which is great, because now I feel safe. (Young Person 3, Glasgow)

In London, by contrast, though we heard of shifting boundaries and groupings, the predominant theme from community members was intergenerational continuity. We heard of different territorial borders and different semi-organized groups rising and waning within a broader sense of intergenerational reproduction of violence. In some cases, the origins of these conflicts were described as obscure, even mythological:

> I don't think we intentionally made it into a gang, but I think if you've been called it so many times then you kind of accept it, do you get what I mean? And there was never an initiation.… We were a bunch of young boys in a bad area playing with each other … and then you're just labelled.… They've taken it on. They don't know the reason why. They've just grown up to dislike each other … but I'm like do you know how this started? You can't tell me. You could not tell me but you just.… And it started out from a fight that no one knows who won. (Youth Worker 5, London)

> It just transitioned down from generation to generation and it became difficult to kind of maintain any healthy relationships in the area. And even now when you look at it, you've still got a group of young people that are there, the majority of them are in jail or on the way out of being in jail … some of their peers are now going into jail for still representing

the area.... Half of them don't even know what their beef is about. Some of this beef that's going on now that these lot are fighting for ... stems from way before me. And I'm a big, old man now, like, it doesn't make any sense. (Youth Worker 15, London)

Rather than uniform alterations to the street field, these experiences suggest a rescaling of the relationship between individual identity and territorial area. As Castells notes, the online realm is not a 'virtual reality', but rather a 'real virtuality' that conjoins digital and physical environments (Castells, 2000: 203), creating new forms of territorial imaginaries that stretch between both contexts (Fraser and van Hellemont, 2021). As Samanani found, young people were 'pushing against the elasticity of tight constraints' (2022: 75) wherever they were to be found.

## 'Triple violence'

Prior studies have demonstrated the deep-seated significance of violence in the street field, with changes to the economic field creating marked challenges to existing models of street masculinities (Hall, 1997). These shifts may have created spaces for alternative models of masculinity that no longer rely on the residual culture of industrial 'hardness', but they may also have exacerbated reliance on these forms of machismo as a defensive response to change. Bourdieu himself wrote of the impact of systemic inequality on youth culture in severely marginalized communities:

> to break out from a fatalistic submission to the forces of the world, the younger of them especially may also use acts of violence which in themselves count for more than, or as much as, the profits they procure ... as a desperate way of existing ... of making something happen rather than nothing. (Bourdieu, 2000: 223)

In Glasgow, long-running historical hostilities had been disrupted but not entirely disappeared. Participants acknowledged overall reductions but noted that, for some young people, violence and territorialism remained an issue—perhaps exacerbated in recent years by the pandemic:

> Particularly young people at the moment who have really been severely impacted by the COVID pandemic there is a risk there. It is bubbling, we are starting to see that territorial, not in the sense of what it was twenty

years ago, but we are starting to see that come in. We have probably seen it recently in terms of large gangs of youths turning up to Glasgow Green and getting into fights. We have seen some of that start to bubble away. (Community Leader 2, Glasgow)

I think part of it is pandemic related, so they've not been in school, they've not had the routine and structure, so the small hardcore of the really challenging families and the kids that haven't been coming to school have gained traction from acolytes who've not been in school, and they've come little Billy big balls. (Senior Education 1, Glasgow)

On the accounts above, then, the violence which has affected their family and community is symptomatic of trauma, distress, and inadequate support—inner psychological tensions can become 'violent emotions' (Retzinger, 1991), particularly with provocation. In our Glasgow data in particular, there was prominent concern about 'violent emotions' being expressed not only through interpersonal violence, aimed at harming rival individuals or areas, but also through rising self-violence.

Francois Cusset (2018: 91) deploys the concept of 'triple violence' to summarize the latent effects of neoliberal political economy, suggesting that it fosters violence 'upon us', 'between us', and 'within us'. These three forms of violence interact and relate in important ways, through 'ripple or derivation effects'. Across both field sites, we saw connections between these differing levels and forms of violence. Violence 'upon us', following Cusset, refers to the 'constraint of structures and the arbitrariness of powers' experienced by young people—the systemic, intersecting meshwork of inequalities that frequently entangle young people involved in violence (Cusset, 2018: 81). Violence 'between us', can refer not only to forms of economic rivalry but to forms of territorial conflict between young people evincing a 'street habitus', as well as, more directly, to interpersonal physical violence (Fraser, 2013). And violence 'within us' alludes to the 'psychic ravages' of life for young people experiencing multiple marginality—the internal tensions and difficulties which arise from experiences of trauma, precarious life and inequality. US-based scholars James et al. (2003) and Johnson Dias (2024) similarly stress the tripartite connections between structural, interpersonal and 'intrapersonal' tensions and harms. As two youth practitioners in Glasgow discuss:

So, rather than the traditional offending we were getting, the things that were becoming much more was about self-harm, suicide. Sort of

> violence, yes … but it usually now comes with self-harm, suicide, mental health. (Frontline Social Worker 2, Glasgow)

> There are more of them self-harming now … so, aye, give me a wild wean running about with a sword any day. Instead of worrying about them fighting on a Friday night, Saturday night I worry about them self-harming all the time, every night. (Frontline Youth Worker 9, Glasgow)

Another youth worker, along similar lines, referred to the growing use of 'mind altering substances' among those they support, as a means to 'escape their reality'. The structural and interpersonal harms discussed above may produce, for some young people, 'a psychological dynamic which is difficult to bear' (Renault, 2017: 145). London respondents expressed similar sentiments—with one youth worker, for instance, conveying an escalating crisis in recent years:

> Mental health became so prominent in the area amongst young people, it was like I could visually see how everything was … all of them just trying to exist…. The best way I could say it is, like, everybody looked like zombies, to be fair, like they were just lost and scared and didn't know what to do. (Youth Worker 11, London)

The street field inhabited by young people in both cities, affected by the ongoing erosion of work and leisure by the forces of austerity and neoliberalism, demonstrate signs of both continuity and change. Expanded social networks may have loosened long-standing territorial identities, but heightened inequality has deepened the role of illicit economies. For the future of violence reduction, and of the public health approach, it is crucial that policy fields remain connected with and responsive to the realities of the street field. In the following section, we explore the potential for a 'permanent symbolic revolution' in violence reduction policy-making: a continued dialogue between the policy and street field, enabling the former to both adapt to and influence change within the latter.

## Permanent revolution?

As discussed in chapter 4, Petzke's (2022) formulation of symbolic revolution contains four components:

1) the conciliation and overcoming of pre-existing discursive opposites;
2) the existence of a cleft habitus in the putative leadership, or symbolic revolutionaries;
3) a sense of impending crises as catalysts of symbolic revolutions; and
4) a return to, and remarshalling of, canonical sources within the field (Petzke, 2022: 490).

In chapters 4–7, we applied these components to the unfolding of public health approaches to violence reduction in Scotland and England, arguing for a shared experience of crisis and an effort to overcome discursive opposites, alongside a divergent experience of leadership and legitimacy. Where Scotland saw the rise of leaders who occupied the position of a 'plural actor' (Lahire, 2011) between fields, whose legitimacy came from the twin forces of heretical authority and charismatic storytelling, in England political legitimacy has remained rooted in the principles of New Public Management and the 'cold charisma' of numbers, diminishing potential for transformative change. The two jurisdictions therefore diverged in how the public health approach to violence reduction was conceptualized and implemented. Previous chapters, then, have been looking at the past in order to inform the present. In what follows, we look to an emergent future.

To produce a progressively more peaceful society—as opposed to the fragile and temporary containment of violence—we suggest in this final section that a 'permanent revolution' is needed. By this we refer to a process of ongoing transformative change, enabled by the continued interaction of street and policy fields. To develop more peaceful societies in both Scotland and England will require enduring action to reduce the acute social suffering experienced within those neighbourhoods which consistently have the highest rates of violence. Sustaining the effectiveness of this action, in turn, necessitates continuous mutual exchange and receptiveness between the street and policy fields: in particular, those occupying policy fields must remain responsive and adaptive to the street. The policy field cannot become ossified or static, but must retain openness to change, if it is not to become detached from the reality of communities. This idea of 'permanent revolution' has distinct ramifications for Scotland and England.

In Scotland, we made the case that policy and street fields experienced 'transformation through mutual exchange' (Liu, 2021: 127), with changes in discourse at the policy level detectable within the 'structures of feeling' at the level of community. The movement for change which promoted the

reframing of violence and the development of new violence reduction approaches developed, to a considerable extent, within the 'space between' street and policy fields: a fruitfully 'fuzzy' (Eyal, 2013: 175), underdetermined zone of innovative thinking and practice. But as Liu emphasizes, any 'history of social spaces' must reckon with instability and flux, both internally within fields, and in how different fields relate to one another. Fields can 'drift apart', and fuzzy spaces of overlap and exchange can diminish in both their extent and their influence. It is always possible that the symbolic revolution of violence reduction policy in Scotland could come to be seen as momentary: a transformative yet short-lived period of connection and mutual (ex)change in the policy and street fields. Community leaders, youth workers and young people in Glasgow emphasized to us the extent to which social suffering continues to pockmark local communities, highlighted the fact that some particular neighbourhoods continue to experience relatively high rates of violence, and expressed fears that the violence reduction which has been achieved in recent years may represent temporary containment, as opposed to permanently enhanced peacefulness. As we saw in chapter 4, recently rates of violent crime have begun to increase slowly once more in Scotland, and there is evidence to suggest that the connection between the street and policy fields may have retreated. Action is required to re-establish and sustain those connections, then, as well as to ameliorate the concentrated adversity experienced in particular communities.

A different form of permanent revolution is needed within Westminster and regional English violence reduction policy-making. As explored in chapter 7 especially, these policy fields have been less conducive to change. The ascent of the public health approach into violence reduction policy orthodoxy at a rhetorical level has not represented a fundamental transformation in the policy-making paradigm. Rather, violence reduction policy and practice has been implemented through the prism of prevailing governmental logics, and the core principles of New Public Management in particular. Relationships between agencies—particularly between state and community bodies—are dominated by contractualism. This has limited possibilities for establishing mutually transformative 'symbiosis' between policy and street fields (Liu, 2021: 130)—connections between the two have been characterized by formalized agreements, audit processes and evaluations, rather than by trust or connection. Though agencies such as Violence Reduction Units and the Youth Endowment Fund have dedicated substantial resource to youth and community voice activities, through youth peer research and Citizen's Advisory Panels for instance (see Irwin-Rogers et al.,

2025), the national policy field, as a whole, appears rigid in its adherence to New Public Management doctrine. Thus, whilst there is evidence of efforts to cultivate 'spaces between' the street and policy fields, these have had limited influence over the governing assumptions of policy-making. The authority of audit culture, combined with the stifling effect of austerity, sharply constrains the adaptability of the policy field. The achievement of a permanent revolution within Westminster and English policy-making, then, would require the policy field to become far more responsive to the street, to facilitate the challenging of prevailing governmental logics.

The form of permanent revolution required at the level of English communities, however, would closely resemble what we have suggested is needed in Scotland: long-term, ongoing activity to address the 'social conditions that predictably breed violence' (Currie, 2016). Enhanced peacefulness cannot be achieved without continuous work at all levels of policy-making to reduce the social suffering concentrated in those communities which consistently experience the highest rates of violence. One striking feature of our community-level data from both Glasgow and London was the regularity with which this message was conveyed by participants.

Following Petzke (2022), across both nations a permanent revolution would require a number of preconditions. It would require a sustained sense of urgency, and sufficient legitimacy and authority from plural actors who can bridge the policy and street fields, forging connection and change. In the remainder of this section, we explore possibilities for such connections between the policy and street fields to be established and maintained, and for plural actors to galvanize a renewed, ongoing symbolic revolution—a 'permanent revolution' in violence reduction policy-making—through two primary components: polycrisis and plural actors. In so doing, we seek to develop what Raymond Williams (1989) terms 'resources of hope'.

## Polycrisis

For Bourdieu, crisis conditions are a necessary precondition for symbolic revolution. An established order 'totters in the periods of crisis', resulting in 'favourable terrain for prophetic intervention... [it's] the poet in precapitalist societies' (2016: 139). Amongst community participants, a sense of not of one but multiple, interlocking crises was apparent. Some concerns were related to the period young people and support services

had spent in isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Others were in the sense of the time communities and services had faced under extreme pressure in terms of poverty, austerity and precarity. Many spoke of the future as being uncertain, unclear or unfathomable without some radical change. In this way, the crisis, either stemming from the past or laying wait in the future, was an ever-present threat—a polycrisis. As one youth worker stated:

> You need to have resources and establishments that are free, accessible, particularly for families nowadays who are getting real troubles with benefit systems, no money, heating … how they're going to heat their house. I mean, we're looking at that just now. Young people will be coming here and probably going home to a no food and no heat. So, the desperate measures that we're trying to look at that is, like, you know, food poverty and fuel poverty now. So, trying to get the building back open at night-time so that young people have got the option of coming here. Most of them want to be outside anyway. But it's still us covering that, to give that wee time when the weather gets really bad fifty weeks a year we're opened. We need to look at what we're … what the people that's got the purse strings can do to help, you know, people on the ground. I think it's all desperate. People are desperate. (Frontline Youth Worker 2, Glasgow)

Pressure points relating to violence between young people stretch out beyond 'Friday nights' or scraps of land where territorial boundaries are marked, related in part to the recasting of disputes into the digital hinterland of social media. Where previously physical violence could be slow in the build-up, conflict building up over days, hanging around for actual instances of violence which would flurry and end quickly, social media appears to collapse both time and space. In the digital realm, tensions can be stoked momentarily, arranged hastily and the aftermath projected instantly.

This sense of crisis, however, was not always echoed in the policy domain. Rather, for our English participants particularly, funding calls and eligibility criteria which target particular 'groups' or 'problem issues' operated on a different time plane, that was well behind practice. Similarly, as recounted in chapter 7, often these would amount to over-prescriptive, targeted interventions at the expense of the wider societal and community issues which were identified as underpinning interpersonal violence. Scotland, too, was not immune to such concerns, as one participant noted: 'I'd also say is gang violence made money. You know, so the East End were getting money from

different sources of Scottish Government funding' (Community Leader 1, Glasgow). In Scotland, there was a perception that as violent crime statistics decreased, and a more hopeful narrative played out publicly, concern and therefore attention, funding and support shifted away from violence prevention and reduction, abandoning the underlying causes and communities affected. For others, policy solutions and support were also tethered to the political winds of change and favour:

> It is frustrating I think, we see it often…with every new political party or new agenda and new manifesto. I think sometimes VRU is another… structures like that and organizations like that move towards that political angle as opposed to actually what is needed on the ground. Just remembering that we are still here as well. (Community Leader 2, Glasgow)

In the media and political worlds, high profile crises come and go. Issues such as violence can be urgent, headline problems in one moment, and then relegated to the margins of attention in the next. The social suffering which fosters consistently higher rates of violence in particular English and Scottish communities, however, is entrenched—it is not a spectacular, momentary crisis, but an ongoing perma-crisis. The sense of urgency among policymakers to address it, therefore, can waver, despite consistent messages from such communities about 'what is needed on the ground'.

## The plural actor

In chapter 5, we set out an analysis of the development of a 'symbolic revolution' in Scotland that centred the significance of 'plural actors' who occupied a space in between street and policy fields. These fields, we argued, represent semi-autonomous spaces, separate but connected, with social actors both straddling and moving between them. As Lahire (2011) argues, individual actors do not occupy single, unified fields, but are constantly traversing multiple field environments, each of which may leave an imprint. The 'plural actor', for Lahire, is one that is reflexively aware of many field cultures, and skilfully manoeuvres between them. In this final section of the chapter, having presented the tensions for actors acting as a bridge between policy and street fields, and having surfaced the changing nature of violence within the street field, we must ask ourselves what lessons can be learned for the future of violence reduction policy-making. In studying the

space between the street and policy field, what lessons can be gleaned which could act as resources of hope to guide the path towards continuous transformational change? The plural actor is a crucial part of our answer.

In both cities, practitioners seek to ameliorate the difficulties experienced by young people and families, and to prevent and reduce violence affecting them. These workers seek to effectively navigate the street field 'below', considering the guidance and directives derived from the policy field 'above'. In Glasgow and London, we heard of the difference made by those workers and organisations who are from or 'of' the neighbourhoods they work in, particularly as effective forces for the reduction of violence at a local level (see e.g. Alexander, 2023b). This unique positionality, in Bourdieu's terms a 'split habitus', represents an important avenue for further development of the public health approach to violence reduction.

Across community interviews in both London and Glasgow, the value and significance of authentic, credible voices in both community and policy settings came through with clarity and coherence. As both Glasgow and London-based young people discuss:

> I think the most support comes from, like, community groups, like ourselves in the community … the people that are in like tough situations, that are like stuck in gang violence or drug addiction and stuff, they don't know where to get the support or access the support. So, it's only there when people out in the community are, like, helping them. (Young Person 2, Glasgow)

> The community members there are just the foot on the ground, they play a huge part in being able to obviously reduce how much violence is, and how things are dealt with. When a young person can find a trusted person in the community, doesn't matter what they're getting themselves involved in, if they can talk to you before anyone else, you're most likely going to get a better result from them. (Young Person 3, London)

Similarly, young people spoke positively about lasting and trusted relationships with adults who can support them, with many able to identify the one or two teachers, support workers and adults in the community who 'are sound', 'have their backs', and 'look out for them'. It was noted as important that safe spaces are based in local communities and where possible staffed by local people. This was seen to be of benefit in a number of ways—local knowledge and understanding; an authenticity and familiarity can remove

barriers to help seeking, and importantly it can model positive behaviour and act as a role model. For many, this included the barriers and facilitators of violence reduction being communicated by individuals and communities with direct experience; ensuring community groups and local activists had a 'seat at the table', and that money- and decision-making power was directed towards organizations and individuals already embedded within communities to deliver support which is sensitive to local dynamics. For a group of young people who had moved on to volunteer in a project they had previously received support from, this local grounding was indispensable:

> I do a session in [scheme] on Fridays, like, and I grew up there, so I either know the kids, or I know the parents of the kids, or whatever. And I think it just makes it easier for them to either talk to, or open up, and it's kind of, the benefit in us being East End. Because a lot of people just open up more when they know you're from there. And it's down to that trust, and yeah, like, I think it makes it just, not easier for us as well, but we know what happens, because we all grew up there, or we've seen it everywhere, yeah. (Young Person 4, Glasgow)

Practitioners in both places wrestle with the tensions between policy and street fields, seeking to ensure that policies are fruitfully translated into action in communities, and that—in turn—street realities affect the thinking of those dwelling in the policy field.

Not only has a cohort of community workers been nurtured who have grown up in the communities they work in, these workers have also found credibility and authority within policy fields. Centring the experience of communities and individuals affected by violence is recognized as both helping to uncover the multifaceted causes and better develop responses and was apparent to the success of both practice developments and policy directions in our study.

> because there's no doubt about it, we were involved in the work in the early 2000s, was definitely impactful and definitely worked. And again, this is a bit of a work that was done years ago when you look at a community in motion and stuff like that, when we worked with primary schools and we worked with … we created places within communities for communities to come and participate and share the problems, but also reflect back to them, well, you're the solution to this problem. And really for us to just have a facilitation in it. (Frontline Youth Worker 4, Glasgow)

Just as young people with 'street capital' can, in certain circumstances, convert this credibility for economic capital in the performance of musical authenticity (Bakkali, 2022), so too can individuals from the 'street field' gain social capital within the policy field. As Liu (2021) notes, individuals spanning such a position can act as 'space travellers' who can manoeuvre between domains.

In Scotland, the growing chorus discussed in chapter 6 included, notably, the leadership and championing of individuals with direct experience of violence, including ex-gang members, individuals in recovery from drugs and alcohol, those with experience of the care and justice system, and those who were victims and family members of those affected by violence. While individual storytelling is not unproblematic (see Beresford, 2002; Cowden and Singh, 2007; Meriluoto, 2019), personal stories contain within them wider narrative arcs which resonate beyond the individual story. In addition, and complementary to this was the direct influence of a policy narrative that was being reframed to promote holistic and person-centred approaches which embraced and respected the voice and experience of community:

> So, I think, you know, we're probably, sort of, we don't give politicians any credit, do you know. But there's probably something in this that actually as a whole Scottish society, Scottish policy, everything has probably come and made things a lot better.... And I think there's a lot to do as well, I think, with the policy coming from above. I think that's been massive. As a Social Worker, I think that's been massive. So, even things like, GIRFEC. We can debate all day about whatever, but it's actually at its heart, it's nice, isn't it? It's about, you know, Getting It Right For Every Child and it was creating a policy context. I think The Promise has been absolutely, it's huge. It's that way of listening to families, do you know? Giving the families a voice. Connecting them to their communities. But the most crucial part to me in it all is, it's about the family, for so long. Because I think at periods, we've looked at the child and I think there's still tension in the system about that. (Frontline Social Worker 2, Glasgow)

If both Scotland and England are to achieve a permanent revolution in violence reduction policy-making—and thereby achieve permanently more peaceful societies—the role of plural actors will be key. Such actors make a vital contribution to violence reduction by cultivating and energizing the

'space between' street and policy fields, and thereby ensuring that the policy field retains attentiveness and responsiveness to the realities experienced in communities. Maintaining credibility and legitimacy within both fields, plural actors are well-positioned to continually facilitate 'mutually transformative exchange'.

## Conclusion

This chapter has laid bare the reality of violence and violence reduction as told by those caught up in its wake: young people, youth workers and 'street level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 2010). In so doing, these participants have offered insight to continuity and change within the 'street field', and some of the systemic and structural forces driving these dynamics. As discussed in chapters 4–7, the 'policy fields' of Holyrood and Westminster are large, heterogeneous assemblages, through which policy decisions operate at the intersection of transnational, national and local forces and which—importantly—are driven by a belief that policy decisions will have an impact on the communities most affected. From our community data, however, the street fields in which violence occurs is more affected by austerity policies and street-level law enforcement approaches, than by the actions of those agencies seeking to implement the public health approach. As we have seen, policy ideas and directives deriving from decision-making elites in each place do not flow freely and unchallenged into the street field. Instead, the policy field and street field at times overlap—a key factor which in Scotland was bringing the street field into dialogue with the policy field—while at others are opposed. As has been suggested, the development of a vibrant 'space between' the two fields could be a fruitful source of creative transformation. In so doing, we suggest the need to centre voices from the street field in the realm of policy—not in a piecemeal way that encourages the fetishization of trauma, but an authentic coalition of differently-positioned individuals.

The chapter has also conveyed an image of Glasgow and London's similarities and differences. Young people and community workers in each city spoke in strikingly similar terms about navigating the challenges of their city's political economy; due especially to deepening inequality, gentrification, and austerity policies. In both places, youth workers were grappling with the effects of social media on young people's everyday lives. However, the street fields of London and Glasgow are evolving in dialogue with the

economic, technological, social and emotional histories of their communities, and to transform them into permanently low-violence societies would require addressing these historical trajectories. If the public health approach is to produce durable, sustainable reductions in violence in both cities, it has to address the entrenched social determinants of violence in each place—the structural conditions of each city's street field. There is a clear need for policymakers to attend to lived reality of communities, address wide-ranging social suffering rather than treating violence as isolable phenomenon. As Frost and Hoggett (2008: 455) put it: 'social suffering is often chronic and enduring rather than open to social engineering and quick fixes'.

The effectiveness and longevity of any symbolic revolution in violence reduction policy pivots on the nature of these relationships between fields: achieving substantial, sustained change 'on the street' through policy-making is reliant upon continuous connection and exchange between policy and street fields. The term 'revolution' can imply a particular transformation which occurred within a specific point in time. For policy to continually act upon the street, remaining responsive to changes in the street field, and thereby facilitating reductions in violence, requires not just the achievement of a single revolutionary moment, but the perpetual dynamism of a 'permanent revolution'. The street field can always leave the policy world behind: it is incumbent on policymakers to maintain the fragile connection between the discursive and bureaucratic world of political decision-making, on the one hand, and the realities of local communities, on the other. The policy field must remain both interwoven with and responsive to the street field, and 'plural actors' engaging in brokerage have a significant role in this. In the final chapter we seek to cohere lessons from across the study into intellectual and practical resources of hope that build from these conclusions.

# 9

# Conclusion

## Resources of Hope?

The reduction in violent crime in Scotland during the early part of the twenty first century was seen by many as a remarkable transformation. From a long-standing reputation as the most violent country in Europe, driven in part by a long-standing issue with territorial youth 'gangs', Scotland was propelled into an international success story (Fraser and Gillon, 2023). The fact that this reduction emerged in a context where violence involving young people was so deeply rooted, and seemingly normalized, was an important part of this narrative journey. Perhaps more importantly still, running alongside this reduction in violence was a gathering movement that sought to reframe violence involving young people as a whole society issue, requiring intervention from across the gamut of public and third sector including education, health, early years, community work, employment, and beyond. As such, it ran counter to much traditional activity in the field of youth crime and appeared to offer a model that others might seek to emulate. Although much existing criminological work has stressed social reproduction, the case study examined in this book offers instances of contingency, ambiguity, and struggle to suggest that alternative futures remain possible. The case study therefore offered the potential for transformative research that cradled a fragile flame of hope. In the words of Raymond Williams (1989), the book has sought to 'make hope practical not despair convincing'.

Though the original study set out to interrogate the causes of the transformation through evaluation of policy and practice, it became, of necessity, a more wide-ranging investigation of the levers of social change and comparative political cultures. Over the course of the last seven chapters,

we have attempted to set out a positive case for Back's conceptualization of hope, as a 'worldly attentiveness to what is emerging in the conditions of the present as they are carried into the future' (2021: 5). Chapter 2 firstly sought to map the contours of international, national, and community scales at which policy change occurs. Offering a scalar approach to policy movement we offered a framework through which to apprehend a multi-level understanding of policy change, as a framework onto which we would then seek to understand how and why change occurs. Chapter 3 then built on this foundation by introducing a conceptual framework through which to analyse the dynamics of social power and institutional cultures through which social transformation might occur in differing social domains. Drawing on the Bourdieusian concept of field, the chapter analysed the drivers of change within both policy and street milieus (Bourdieu, 1984), introducing the concept of symbolic revolution as way of conceptualizing violence reduction in both contexts. We also engaged with Bourdieu's later work, *The Weight of the World,* to bring focus to the street fields of Glasgow and London (Shammas and Sandberg, 2016).

In chapters 4 and 5, we looked back at the causes and consequences of violence reduction in Scotland, in an effort to rekindle a 'spark of hope in the past' (Benjamin, 1973: 257; cited in Back, 2021: 18). Applying Petzke's concept of 'symbolic revolution' to Scotland, the chapters traced the role of crisis, reformulation of debate, split habitus and canonical sources in Scotland's violence reduction journey, arguing that a wide-ranging social movement cohered around an alternative approach to young people in conflict with the law. Chapter 5 analysed the 'canonical sources' that precipitated this transformation. While evidence of effectiveness of the public health approach is complex, in this chapter we argued that its appeal lay less in concrete evaluation and more in its storied character. In essence this argues for the significance of individual agents, working in the context of an amenable policy context, in which stories, storytellers, and audiences successfully aligned.

As well as requiring an attentiveness to the past, Back argues, a sociology of hope also demands a clear-eyed engagement with the present, and 'the anticipation that something unexpected will happen and emerge from its ruins' (Back, 2021: 7). We did this by applying Petzke's concept of symbolic revolution to the evolution of violence reduction policy at the regional and national levels in England during the period 2014–2023, seeking to apply the same logic. While three of the features of symbolic revolutions were apparent, to varying extents, when we looked more closely we saw a different

collection of policies and practices between Scotland and England, and ultimately this 'agonistic' period of struggle did not result in change. In chapter 6 we explored some of the reasons behind this resolution, through particular reference to the 'canonical sources' in the Westminster policy field, involving techniques of governance associated with New Public Management (Power, 1999; Hood, 2007). Among other effects, these modes of governance limit the potential for storytelling and charismatic actors. Unlike Scotland, in England our respondents described a policy world dominated by market organization and the 'cold charisma of numbers' (Mau, 2019) rather than the charismatic authority of leaders.

An attentiveness to the present requires an appreciation of the depth and scale of the issues at stake. This is what Bourdieu and colleagues referred to, at the turn of the millennium, as the 'weight of the world' (1999). As Back argues, in crafting hope's work we 'need to take in and live with the trouble, the damage and the wreckage' (Back 2021: 18). Chapter 7, finally, focused on the contemporary dynamics of violence among young people today. Hearing from the voices of young people affected by violence alongside those of frontline practitioners, the chapter outlined the contemporary dynamics of violence involving young people in Glasgow and London, identifying both commonalities and differences. Applying Cusset's concept of 'triple violence', we argued that the dynamics of violence have evolved since the early work of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU), requiring a redoubling of efforts at violence prevention. Finally, the chapter applied the concept of symbolic revolution in a search for 'resources of hope' that may foster the urgent shift in policy and practice to respond to the contemporary landscape of harm. As Nasar Meer, drawing on the work of Lauren Berlant, argues that optimism 'is not the same as naivety or being "co-opted" but an attempt at repair' (Meer, 2022: 3). This form of 'cruel optimism', for Berlant, is 'a condition of possibility that also risks having to survive, once more, disappointment' (Berlant, 2011: 121–122; quoted in Meer, 2022: 4).

The movement for change that took place in Scotland can be described, in Bourdieu's terms, as a 'symbolic revolution' (Bourdieu, 2017) in which the basic tenets of a given field are restructured, creating new cognitive structures in the process (Bourdieu, 2017: 3). The discursive construction of violence in Scotland can be characterized as having been reframed, from a normalized sense of inertia to a point of mobilization. In Scotland, in the years running up to the Independence Referendum in 2014, a window opened in public discourse for an alternative future to be imagined—one,

crucially, that positioned Scotland as a progressive liberal democracy that contrasted with the Westminster order. In Petzke's terms, the movement for violence reduction emerged during a moment of political crisis, led by individuals who occupied new spaces between fields, who were able to mobilize a reframing of existing binaries, and who found legitimacy from both external and internal sources. Against this backdrop, the Scottish case study affords a sense of the preconditions for cultural change—and in turn those of policy and practice. Crucially, the extent to which this can be described as a 'public health approach' in the World Health Organization sense is highly contestable. Nonetheless, the discursive appeal of the phrase is undeniable. In criminology, much has been written on the concept of the 'folk devil' as a distillation of popular fear and anxieties. Borrowing from Murray Edelman, Newburn and Jones (2007: 237) described zero tolerance policing as a 'condensation symbol': a symbolic form that works to 'merge diverse anxieties and emotions with a shared expectation about the time, the place, and the action that will evoke common support and a common perception of an enemy' (1971: 135).

Stan Cohen's classic study of the Mods and the Rockers, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972), devised a lasting sociological conceptualization of the construction of a sensationalized 'folk devil' that acts as a lightning rod for a deeper set of public anxieties. In this study, conversely, we have identified the rise of specified individuals, or indeed groups, who from time to time become associated with a deeper set of hopes and ambitions. These individuals, which the violence reduction movement in Scotland fostered, we term 'folk heroes'. As opposed to a pervading sense of panic, these 'folk heroes' come to represent a broader set of policy prescriptions—in the case of Scotland and England, the public health approach to violence reduction—which can galvanize broader movement. The evidence of a 'ripple effect' of the SVRU's leadership, galvanizing change across different sectors. Buttressed by a series of complementary shifts in education policy, social work practice, and youth justice reform, Scotland's experience of violence reduction is best understood as resulting from what one interviewee called 'a thousand small sanities', in which storytelling played an important role. In sum, reductions in violence in Scotland are perhaps best understood as the result of a *movement for change* that traversed policy, practice, media, education, health, and policing—among others—and that manifested as a shift in public discourse on violence, the strengthening of voices of lived experience in policy-formation, and a revitalized international reputation for Scotland.

The study aimed, in different ways, to move beyond the 'success story' of reductions of violence involving young people and explore narratives of violence that remain underexamined. As recent scholarship has shown (Annison and Condry, 2022; Mackenzie et al., 2023), narratives that are hidden from public view often deep-seated norms. For example, violence against women and girls, and repeat violence and victimization, seldom feature in the public narrative of violence and violence reduction (Strid, Walby, and Armstrong, 2013), yet recent studies have highlighted the intimate connections between violence involving young people and domestic and gendered forms of violence (Levell, 2022). Future policy and practice must seek to bridge between these siloed areas of policy-making and attend to the lived realities and complexities of violence as it impacts on both public and domestic space (Batchelor and Gormley, 2023).

The case study also ought to test the applicability of the Scottish example to policy and practice as it exists today. As has been argued, the transfer of the VRU 'model' from Scotland to England and Wales, occurring from 2018 onwards, was almost as remarkable as the initial reduction in violence in Scotland. Scotland may have been described in many ways within the corridors of Whitehall, but a source of policy learning was seldom one of them. Instead, as we have seen (Cairney and St Denny, 2020), Westminster politicians more commonly look to the United States for inspiration. The search for a creative solution in Scotland was doubly significant in that it occurred in the context of an adversarial political relationship between the SNP-led Scottish Government, and the incumbent Conservative Government under Theresa May. Why did this occur? In chapter 7 we use Petzke's 'symbolic revolution' framework to interrogate some of the reasons behind this shift. The sense of impending crisis was comparable to Glasgow in 2004, with mounting public concern and political pressure to act. As in Scotland, there was broad cross-party support for the movement, prompted by the work of the Youth Violence Commission. And, as in Scotland, there was a leader in Sadiq Khan that was able to occupy a space between political and community contexts.

Rapidly, however, there was a radical shift in emphasis in the development of VRUs. Rather than bottom-up organizations that emerged locally, the announcement that the Home Office were to fund a further eighteen VRUs nationwide created a top-down administrative structure that, in effect, constrained the freedom and latitude of movement that made the original VRU successful. The English and Welsh VRU structure effectively prevented, rather than facilitated, the forms of change that occurred in

Scotland. By forging the organizations out of existing bureaucratic structures, with restrictive reporting mechanisms, the capacity for charismatic leadership was rendered challenging at best. By separating the VRUs into discrete local entities, each with little overall coherence, the capacity to reframe political or public debate was effectively nullified. And by embedding the principles of New Public Management, alongside a regime of legitimacy grounded in a narrow definition of 'evidence', the ability of VRUs to experiment and 'fail fast' was significantly curtailed. Hence, we have argued that the movement for public health approaches to violence reduction in England and Wales does not represent a 'symbolic revolution' in Bourdieu's terms.

Over the summer of 2024, Glasgow once more awoke to the news that a teenager had lost his life to violence, with a thirteen-year-old boy subsequently arrested. As we argued in chapter 8, violence involving young people remains an urgent topic both north and south of the border. Rates of violence have been increasing in both jurisdictions, with interpersonal violence one aspect of a wider set of issues that include mental health, precarious living conditions, and the withdrawal of social supports. Drawing on Bourdieu's collaborative work, *The Weight of the World*, we illustrated how communities in Glasgow and London remain marked by both chronic financial struggle and the variegated consequences of inequalities. The 'street field' occupied by young people has evolved, with alliances becoming more fragmented and debt looming large in everyday life. Designing social policy that can make a difference to young people bound up in today's street culture does not resemble that of the past, and policies need to be alive to these shifts. Across both street-based and policy-contexts, global flows of culture, technology, and ideas enter into a social environment weighted with established logics and forms of capital. In some moments, these global flows blend seamlessly with existing field arrangements, as when street culture merges with the 'digital street' (Lane, 2019). In others, however, points of tension and friction emerge. As Tsing notes, such global connections are premised upon sticky, 'contingent lineages' (Tsing, 2005: 145). Policy flows are not free-floating phenomena but are tethered to concrete policy networks and circuits of power that cross-cut international and national contexts (McCann and Ward, 2012). In analysing social change at both policy and street level, therefore, it is important to appreciate the points of friction as ideas travel between differing international, national, and local contexts.

As we argued, however, the potential of individuals able to wield legitimacy in multiple social spaces, and thereby pursue change, remains important. For some, navigating the directives derived from the policy field whilst grappling with the social suffering on the street is a dispiriting, disempowering endeavour. For others, windows of opportunity arise for them to mobilize their 'sense of the game' from the street, alongside the communities they work with, to build a movement for change. If the conditions of the policy field are receptive, substantial transformation can result. As Goodman, Phelps and Page have argued, penal policy change should not be conceived as a 'pendular' logic swinging back and forth between punitive and welfarist logics. Instead, it is better conceptualized as a field of *struggle*, which they term an 'agonistic' perspective, in which 'actors (or 'agonists') with varying resources and differing visions of how to prevent and sanction crime continually contest punishment (Goodman et al., 2017: 3). The study has revealed the space of violence reduction in England and Wales as one of ongoing struggle at local, city, and national levels, with differently positioned actors seeking to use available resources to promote an alternative vision of violence prevention. In this regard, we identified strong currents of discourse in favour of a public health approach, and instances of local systems-leadership that have driven reductions in violence. At the same time, however, the countercurrents in political and media discourse have proven difficult to overcome. As we write this conclusion, a new Labour Government has recently begun consultations on an alternative vision for violence involving young people: one focused on employment, aspiration and 'Young Futures'.

The success narrative of the VRU contributed to the founding of further VRUs, first in London then across England and Wales. The evidence presented here suggests that the successful shift in narrative in Scotland was facilitated by a set of structural and agentic conditions that may be difficult to replicate wholesale. As has been argued, the narrative of hope and redemption personified by the SVRU struck a chord with both the 'deep story' of egalitarianism in Scotland, and the historical moment of an independence referendum, conditions that are unlikely to reoccur in other contexts. In this sense, the historical, cultural and political contexts in which policy change occurs (Loader and Sparks, 2004)—and the 'agonistic interplay' between policy actors as the crucial determinant of change (Goodman, Page and Phelps, 2017)—may be as important as the policy initiative itself. In recent years, the public health approach has been put forward as a policy

solution in jurisdictions from Sweden to Australia, Canada to Ireland.[1] One of the key contributions of this book has been the significance of national politics and bureaucratic systems in the movement of a policy idea, but— we feel—the principles of connecting policy and street, of finding ways of communicating positive change in the appropriate form for the audience, and leveraging the power of collaboration across sectors represents an important pathway to a principled transfer. As Bourdieu suggests, during such a moment '[t]he belief that this or that future ... is possible ... can, in some historical conditions, mobilise a group around it and so help to favour or prevent the coming of that future' (Bourdieu, 1997: 235).

Though Bourdieu wrote comparatively little on matters of punishment and criminalization (Shammas, 2018), references to Bourdieu's work within criminology have in the last decade gathered into a steady stream. To date Bourdieusian criminology has illuminated the life-worlds of penal, street and police cultures but awaits studies that more effectively and systematically explore individual trajectories across multiple fields of crime and justice. In this book we have sought to introduce new elements of Bourdieu's *oeuvre*—most notably notions of 'split habitus', 'symbolic revolution', and 'social suffering'—to highlight the continuing relevance of these conceptual tools to make a case for Bourdieu's political or publicly-engaged scholarship. Policy ideas and directives deriving from decision-making elites do not flow freely and unchallenged into the street field, however. Bringing together policy and the street shows the similar weighting and freighting of capitals, as well as the distance between them, but also that the distance is not unbridgeable. We believe that further work on the 'space between fields' and the role of the 'plural actor' represents a fruitful future direction for both conceptual and applied work, as well as in the practical building of movements for change in social life.

As criminologists have long recognized, structural change to the systems of inequality that perpetuate social harm are depressingly difficult to recalibrate. Analysis of temporal change, through the social and cultural domain of *field*, however, enables an understanding of history as contingent and

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[1] For discussion of these various transfers see, e.g.: https://bra.se/bra-in-english/home/crime-and-statistics/crime-prevention/gvi.html [accessed 10 June 2025].https://www.nationaltribune.com.au/36-million-to-keep-next-generation-on-track/ [accessed 10 June 2025].https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/15611983.canada-following-scotlands-success-story-tackling-violence/ [accessed 10 June 2025].https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/would-scotlands-solution-to-knife-crime-work-in-ireland-1.4676717 [accessed 10 June 2025].

'fractal', involving competition and struggle between differently situated actors (Sewell, 1996). In this context we should be attentive to 'contestation and resistance' and to treat 'the conflict between cultural meanings and political ideas as central to understanding trajectories of change' (Loader and Sparks, 2004: 16). As Churchill (2019: 480) argues:

> Change in crime control is divergent, staggered and incremental at least as often as it is unidirectional, simultaneous and transformative. Equally, crime control history advances not as a simple succession of discrete movements, but rather as a complex concurrence of distinct rhythms.

The case study presented here brings focus to the role of individual actors, social movements, and political context in mobilizing forces for change— and, we argue, the importance of individual stories of social transformation and hope to offer a positive case for change. As Raymond Williams himself notes: '[p]eople change, it is true, in struggle and by action. Anything as deep as a dominant structure of feeling is only changed by active experience' (1989: 76). This task, which Williams referred to as the 'long revolution', is one that keeps alight the pale flame of hope with which we embarked on the study.

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