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## The Politics of Crime

Over the past several decades, the U.S. government has enthusiastically declared and waged wars against crime and drugs. It is often assumed that these wars were a response to rising levels of crime and drug use. Like many popular theories, this assumption rests on a few kernels of truth: Crime—especially lethal violence—is a significant problem in the United States, the drug trade did expand in the 1970s and 1980s, and this trade frequently generates a good deal of violence. However, as we saw in Chapter 2, the best available evidence suggests that levels of crime did not increase significantly over the past 30 years and have actually dropped a good deal in the past decade—even as rates of incarceration have continued to climb. Similarly, levels of illegal drug use have declined sharply since their peak in the late 1970s. Even if the incidence of crime and drug use had been steadily increasing, this would not explain why crime and drugs came to play such a crucial role in national politics, why “getting tough” was seen as the best response to the crime and drug problems, or why political leaders of both parties came to accept this approach.

In this chapter, we focus squarely on this issue: Why have national-level politicians so vigorously waged a war on crime and drugs that has created the largest prison population in the world? We argue that in response to the social challenges of the 1960s, conservative political leaders—and, increasingly, those at the national level—began to highlight the problem of street crime in an attempt to steer state policy toward social control and away from social welfare.

That prominent national politicians began to construct these social problems in ways that imply the need for get-tough policies was not inevitable. Social problems like crime may be framed in a number of different ways, each of which has quite distinct policy implications. Crime, for example, may be depicted as evidence of the breakdown of law and order, of the demise of the traditional two-parent family, or of social and economic inequality. Thus, crime-related issues, like other social problems and issues, are socially and politically constructed: They acquire their meaning through struggles over their interpretation and representation. Social actors—sometimes called “claimsmakers” (Kitsuse & Spector, 1973)—compete for the public’s attention and attempt to gain acceptance for the frames whose policy implications they prefer (Edelman, 1988; Gamson, 1992; Gamson & Lasch, 1983; Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; Gusfield, 1967; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988).

The frames that come to dominate the political and cultural landscape are likely to have a significant impact on policy. For example, to the extent that crime is seen as a consequence of lenience within the criminal justice system, policies that get tough with criminal offenders seem most appropriate. Conversely, frames that depict crime as a consequence of poverty, unemployment, or inequality suggest the need for policies that address these social and economic conditions. Debates over penal policy are less influenced by social scientific research than by the way crime-related problems are framed in political discourse (Garland, 1990, p. 20).

In what follows, we show that conservative politicians have worked for decades to alter popular perceptions of crime, delinquency, addiction, and poverty, and to promote policies that involve “getting tough” and “cracking down.” We also show that when advocating such policies, these political elites were not simply responding to popular beliefs and sentiments about crime and punishment, although they did help to shape the public’s perceptions of the crime problem and preferences regarding what to do about it. Rather, their claims-making activities were part of a larger effort to realign the electorate in ways that favor the GOP and, even more significantly, to reorient state policy around social control rather than social welfare.

Over time, the responsiveness of electorally important segments of the public to the discourse of law and order did make it difficult for politicians to offer alternatives to the war on crime and drugs. By the late 1980s and into the 1990s, politicians of both parties were responding to popular desire for tough crime and drug policies. Today’s tough-on-crime

(and welfare) policies reflect the success of ongoing efforts to reframe the crime and drug problems as the consequence of excessive permissiveness.

Of course, the public is not always responsive to politicians' efforts to frame social problems in particular ways. In Chapter 6, we will explore popular views and sentiments in greater detail in order to illuminate why some members of the public did respond favorably to calls for law and order. We will also explore evidence that popular receptivity to the rhetoric of the war on crime has been more limited and superficial than is generally recognized, and pay particular attention to indications that public support for some aspects of it is eroding. For now, though, our emphasis is on the way in which politicians mobilized and framed the crime issue and the consequences of that mobilization for political culture and social policy.

Our analysis begins in the tumultuous decade of the 1960s, when southern officials first mobilized the discourse of law and order in their efforts to discredit the civil rights movement. As the decade progressed, conservative opponents of the welfare state also used this rhetoric to attack President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs and the structural explanations of poverty with which these programs were associated. Conservatives offered two theories of the newly politicized crime problem:

- An individualistic theory suggesting that both poverty and crime are freely chosen by dangerous and undeserving individuals who refuse to work for a living and are not penalized for doing so
- A cultural theory asserting that the "culture of welfare" is the primary cause of a variety of social ills, including poverty, crime, delinquency, and drug addiction

Although distinct in some ways, these individualistic and cultural theories both identify "permissiveness" as the underlying cause of crime and imply the need to strengthen the state's control apparatus. As a rallying cry for Republicans, the permissiveness frame helped forge the party's new (but unstable) political majority. In the 1980s and 1990s, the ascendance of this frame has also helped to legitimate the assault on the welfare state and the dramatic expansion of the penal system. In short, the construction of the crime issue as a consequence of excessive permissiveness has been extraordinarily useful to conservative opponents of civil rights and the welfare state.

## *The Origins of the Discourse of Law and Order*

In the years following the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, civil rights activists across the South used direct action tactics and civil disobedience to force reluctant southern states to desegregate public facilities. In an effort to sway public opinion against the civil rights movement, southern governors and law enforcement officials characterized its tactics as "criminal" and indicative of the breakdown of "law and order."<sup>1</sup> Calling for a crackdown on the "hoodlums," "agitators," "street mobs," and "lawbreakers" who challenged segregation and African American disenfranchisement, these officials made rhetoric about crime a key component of political discourse on race relations.

As the debate over civil rights moved to Washington, depictions of civil rights protest as criminal rather than political in nature reached the national stage. For example, after President Kennedy unenthusiastically expressed his willingness to press for the passage of civil rights legislation in 1963, Republicans and southern Democrats assailed him for "rewarding lawbreakers" (Cronin, Cronin, & Milakovich, 1981). Later, Richard Nixon (1966) blamed civil rights leaders for the problems of crime and violence, arguing that

the deterioration of respect for the rule of law can be traced directly to the spread of the corrosive doctrine that every citizen possesses an inherent right to decide for himself which laws to obey and when to disobey them. (p. 64)

Throughout this period, phrases like "crime in the streets" and "law and order" equated political dissent with crime and were used by conservatives in an attempt to heighten opposition to the civil rights movement. Conservatives also identified the civil rights movement—and, in particular, the philosophy of civil disobedience—as a leading cause of crime. Countering the trend toward lawlessness, they argued, would require holding criminals (including civil rights protesters) accountable for their actions through swift, certain, and severe punishment.

The rhetoric of "law and order" became more prominent in 1964, when Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater announced that "the abuse of law and order in this country is going to be an issue [in this election]—at least I'm going to make it one because I think the responsibility has to start some place" (Caplan, 1973, p. 585). Despite

the fact that crime did not even appear on the list of issues identified by the public as the nation's most important, Goldwater, a prominent civil rights opponent, made "law and order" the centerpiece of his campaign and promised that his party would do more to protect it:

Tonight there is violence in our streets, corruption in our highest offices, aimlessness among our youth, anxiety among our elderly. . . . Security from domestic violence, no less than from foreign aggression, is the most elementary form and fundamental purpose of any government, and a government that cannot fulfill this purpose is one that cannot command the loyalty of its citizens. History shows us that nothing prepares the way for tyranny more than the failure of public officials to keep the streets safe from bullies and marauders. We Republicans seek a government that attends to its fiscal climate, encouraging a free and a competitive economy and enforcing law and order. ("Goldwater's Acceptance Speech," 1964, p. A9)

There is no evidence that these early claims-making activities were a response to a demonstrable increase in public concern about crime. Opinion poll data show that other concerns—especially civil rights and the Vietnam War—were of far more concern to most Americans. On the other hand, it does appear that the tough anticrime rhetoric struck a chord among some voters; those opposed to social and racial reform were especially receptive to calls for law and order (Barkan & Cohn, 1994; Bennett & Tuchfarber, 1975; Cohn, Barkan, & Halteman, 1991; Corbett, 1981).

The responsiveness of these members of the electorate does not imply that they were manipulated or duped by political elites. Rather, the discourse of law and order provided a means by which a number of preexisting fears and concerns—about the pace and nature of social change, as well as the means used in an attempt to bring this change about—were tapped, organized, and given expression. As urban riots became a more frequent and highly publicized occurrence, the discourse of law and order provided a compelling means by which these concerns about social change, racial reform, and increasingly unruly forms of political protest could be expressed.

Ironically, it was the success of the civil rights movement in discrediting more explicit expressions of racist sentiment that led politicians to attempt to appeal to the public with rhetoric that tapped into white fears regarding racial reform in more subtle ways

(Omi, 1987; Omi & Winant, 1986). In subsequent years, conservative politicians also found the crime issue, with its racial subtext now firmly in place, useful in their attempt to redefine poverty as the consequence of individual failure and to recast welfare programs and their recipients in an unflattering light.

### ***From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime***

Throughout the 1960s, civil and welfare rights activists drew national attention to the issue of poverty. These activists not only highlighted the plight of the poor, but also argued that inequality of opportunity and racial discrimination ensured that poverty would remain widespread and concentrated in minority communities. To remedy this situation, they sought, among other things, to expand the Great Society welfare programs. These programs, they argued, were not only a humane and appropriate response to poverty, but also a means of addressing the crime problem. Politicians who also supported the Great Society programs echoed this view. Early in his administration, for example, President Johnson argued that programs that attacked social inequality were, in effect, anticrime programs:

There is something mighty wrong when a candidate for the highest office bemoans violence in the streets but votes against the war on poverty, votes against the Civil Rights Act, and votes against major educational bills that come before him as a legislator. (Johnson, 1965, p. 1371)

By contrast, conservative opponents of the Great Society programs argued that poverty and crime were caused by a combination of bad people and excessive “permissiveness.” Independent presidential candidate George Wallace ridiculed “soft social theories” of crime in especially memorable ways:

If a criminal knocks you over the head on your way home from work, he will be out of jail before you're out of the hospital and the policeman who arrested him will be on trial. But some psychologist will say, well, he's not to blame, society is to blame. His father didn't take him to see the Pittsburgh Pirates when he was a little boy.<sup>2</sup>

According to this conservative argument, crime and related social problems originate in individual choice and greed rather than in social

conditions; acting as though crime is affected by social conditions is not only wrong, but lets people off the hook when they make irresponsible choices.

For some opponents of the welfare state, discussions of street crime also illustrated the dysfunctionality of the poor that, they argued, was the true cause of their poverty. According to this culture-of-poverty thesis, poor people are poor because of their cultural values; programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) would only reward non-work-oriented lifestyles, thereby worsening the problems of poverty and crime. Furthermore, some suggested, the mere existence of welfare encouraged poor people to think that they are entitled to that which they have not earned. In this twist on the culture-of-poverty thesis, conservatives argued that the “culture of welfare” undermines the (already weak) self-discipline of the poor and promotes “parasitism”—both legal (welfare dependency) and illegal (crime) (Moynihan, 1973, p. 42).<sup>3</sup> As presidential candidate Barry Goldwater put it so succinctly,

If it is entirely proper for the government to take away from some to give to others, then won't some be led to believe that they can rightfully take from anyone who has more than they? No wonder law and order has broken down, mob violence has engulfed great American cities, and our wives feel unsafe in the streets. (Matusow, 1984, p. 143)

In the mid-1960s, then, liberals and conservatives offered very different explanations of poverty and crime-related problems. According to liberals, social conditions—especially racial inequality and limited opportunities for youth—were the root causes of crime, poverty, and addiction. It is only by addressing these social conditions, they argued, that we may begin to ameliorate the problems they cause. By contrast, conservatives argued that social pressures such as racism, inadequate employment, lack of housing, low wages, and poor education do not cause crime. Instead, people are poor, criminal, or addicted to drugs because they made irresponsible or bad choices. Ironically, social programs aimed at helping the poor only encourage them to make these choices by fostering a culture of dependency and predation.

Highlighting the behavioral pathologies and, especially, the criminality of the poor was thus part of an attempt to transform their image from needy to undeserving. The changing racial composition of welfare recipients may also have facilitated this transformation of the public perception of the poor: Continued migration to northern cities from

southern and rural areas meant that increasing numbers of those who received AFDC were African American women and their children. By emphasizing street crime and framing it as the consequence of bad people making bad choices, conservatives made it much less likely that members of the public would empathize with the plight of the poor and support measures to assist them. As historian Michael Katz (1989) suggested, when the poor appeared to be dangerous, they were perceived as the undeserving underclass.<sup>4</sup>

As early as 1965, the liberal emphasis on the root causes of crime began to weaken in the face of this conservative onslaught. Only 4 months after his election, for example, President Johnson declared in an unprecedented special message to Congress his new determination to fight crime: "I hope that 1965 will be regarded as the year when this country began in earnest a thorough and effective war against crime" (Johnson, 1966, p. 264). Toward that end, Johnson established the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), an agency with a mission to support local law enforcement. To coordinate law enforcement activities aimed at fighting drugs, Johnson also created the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs (now called the Drug Enforcement Agency). These initiatives represented a shift away from the view that the most important crime-fighting weapons were civil rights legislation, War on Poverty programs, and other policies aimed at promoting inclusion and social reform. Over time, the liberal commitment to assisting the poor also attenuated (Bayer, 1981).

## The Republican Southern Strategy

The Republican commitment to waging war on crime intensified during and after 1968. During the campaign that year, Republican candidate Richard Nixon followed his conservative predecessors by rejecting social explanations of crime and arguing that the lenience of the criminal justice system was, in fact, to blame for crime and violence. Throughout his campaign, Nixon insisted that the "solution to the crime problem is not the quadrupling of funds for any governmental war on poverty but more convictions" (Marion, 1994, p. 70).

This rhetorical emphasis on crime was part of a political strategy, developed after the 1964 elections, aimed at weakening the electoral base of the Democratic Party: the New Deal coalition. This alliance of northern, urban ethnic groups and the white South had dominated electoral politics since 1932. But the fact that increasing numbers of African

Americans were migrating to the North and acquiring voting rights created quite a dilemma for Democratic officials interested in attracting African American voters while simultaneously maintaining white southern allegiance to the party. In 1948, Democratic President Harry Truman responded to the growing number of African American voters by pressing for a relatively strong civil rights platform, and the first serious signs of strain in the Democratic partnership appeared. In protest, white southerners organized a states' rights party, and in the subsequent election, four Deep South states (Louisiana, South Carolina, Alabama, and Mississippi) delivered their electoral votes to this insurgent political force. Democrats moved quickly to pull in disaffected white southerners only to have the Republican share of the African American vote increase from 21% in 1952 to 39% in 1956 (Phillips, 1969).

By drawing public attention to the plight of African Americans in the South, civil rights activists forced the Democratic Party to choose between its southern white and northern African American constituencies. Nightly newscasts during the period featured peaceful civil rights protesters being hauled off, rounded up, and otherwise brutalized by southern law enforcement agents. Not surprisingly, support for the civil rights cause grew among nonsouthern whites. This development, along with the increasing numbers of African American voters, eventually led the Democratic Party to cast its lot with African Americans and their northern allies.

Although this decision secured for the Democrats the loyalty of most African American voters, it alienated some of those traditionally loyal to the Democratic Party, particularly white southerners. "Millions of voters, pried loose from their habitual loyalty to the Democratic Party, were now a volatile force, surging through the electoral system without the channeling restraints of Party attachment" (Edsall & Edsall, 1991, p. 41). These voters were "available for courting," and the Republicans moved swiftly to seize the opportunity.

Initially, the GOP targeted white southerners—voters who had formerly composed the Democrats' "solid South"—as potential "swing voters." This strategy certainly paid off: The formerly Democratic South is now overwhelmingly Republican, a trend that the resurgence of evangelicalism, concentrated in the so-called Bible Belt, has helped to solidify.

Over time, Republican analysts began to suggest that northern white suburbanites; ethnic Catholics in the Northeast and Midwest; and white, blue-collar workers might also be receptive to their socially conservative and racially coded rhetoric. Some conservative political strategists

frankly admitted that appealing to racial fears and antagonisms was central to this strategy. For example, political analyst and consultant Kevin Phillips argued that a Republican victory and long-term realignment was possible primarily on the basis of racial issues, and therefore suggested the use of coded anti-black campaign rhetoric (Phillips, 1969, p. 39). Similarly, John Ehrlichmann, Special Counsel to the President, described the Nixon administration's campaign strategy of 1968 in this way: "We'll go after the racists. That subliminal appeal to the anti-African-American voter was always present in Nixon's statements and speeches" (Ehrlichmann, 1970, p. 233).

New sets of Republican constituencies were thus courted through the use of racially charged code words—phrases and symbols that “refer indirectly to racial themes but do not directly challenge popular democratic or egalitarian ideals” (Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 120). The discourse of “law and order” is an excellent example of such coded language, and allowed for the indirect expression of racially charged fears and antagonisms.<sup>5</sup> In the context of increasingly unruly street protests, urban riots, and media reports that the crime rate was rising, the capacity of conservatives to mobilize, shape, and express these racial fears and tensions became a particularly important political resource.

As the traditional working-class coalition that buttressed the Democratic Party was ruptured along racial lines, race eclipsed class as the organizing principle of American politics. By 1972, attitudes on racial issues, rather than socioeconomic status, were the primary determinant of voters' political self-identification (Edsall & Edsall, 1991, p. 150). The “southern strategy,” as this tactic came to be known, eventually enabled the Republican Party to create a new division between some (mostly white) working- and middle-class voters and the traditional Republican elite, on one hand, and “liberal elites” and the (disproportionately African American and Latino) poor on the other.

The initial success of the “southern strategy” helps to explain why the liberal commitment to tackling the root causes of crime weakened over the course of the 1960s. At first glance, the Democratic embracement of law and order is puzzling: Throughout this period, much of the public retained the view that crime has environmental and social causes and remained committed to addressing these. But leaders in the Democratic Party were especially worried about the views and sentiments of a particular segment of the voting public: swing voters. Like

their Republican counterparts, Democratic strategists had noted that economically liberal but socially conservative white voters were shifting their loyalties to the Republicans—and were strongly attracted to the Republican campaign for law and order. The liberal backpedaling on crime appears to have been part of an attempt to woo these voters back to the Democratic Party.

The long-term result of the GOP's southern strategy has been not so much a partisan realignment that works consistently in its favor, but rather the destabilization of the electoral system. The number of swing voters (as well as nonvoters) has grown, and voters increasingly cast their ballot for the candidate (rather than the party) they prefer. Analysis of these swing voters—variously referred to as the forgotten workers; Reagan Democrats; waitress moms; lunch-pail dads; soccer moms; and, most recently, office park dads—has become something of an industry among pollsters and political analysts.

The increased importance of these swing voters, along with Republican and Democratic reluctance to target and mobilize alienated (and disproportionately young, poor, and nonwhite) nonvoters and the winner-take-all electoral college system, encourage candidates from both parties to avoid taking anything that might be perceived as a controversial stand. Of course, the perceived need to court swing voters sometimes conflicts with the parties' need to maintain the allegiance of their more loyal base. But in the case of crime, the apparent popularity of the get-tough approach, especially among swing voters, meant that challenges to the war on crime have been few and far between.

The shift in liberal political discourse also occurred in the context of growing criticism, from scholars and activists across the political spectrum, of rehabilitation (Bayer, 1981). Not surprisingly, conservatives opposed rehabilitation on the grounds that punishment must be harsh and painful if it is to deter crime. But many liberals also became critical of policies associated with rehabilitation during this period, arguing that open-ended (“indeterminate”) sentences designed to facilitate the correction of offenders created the potential for the intrusive, discriminatory, and arbitrary exercise of power. Under the weight of these twin (if quite distinctive) critiques, the rehabilitative project was called into question. The declining legitimacy of rehabilitation as a penal philosophy undoubtedly made it more difficult for liberal politicians to offer a clear alternative to the conservative calls to crack down on criminals, and may also have facilitated the Democratic leap onto the law-and-order bandwagon.

## Nixon's Federalist Dilemma

After assuming office, the Nixon administration was forced to contend with the fact that the federal government has little authority to deal directly with street crime outside of Washington, DC. Administration insiders concluded that the only thing they could do was “exercise vigorous symbolic leadership.” Toward that end, they waged war on crime by adopting “tough-sounding rhetoric” and pressing for largely ineffectual but highly symbolic legislation (Epstein, 1977, p. 69). Not fooled, journalists began to report that, despite Nixon's tough talk, the crime rate was still rising.

Nixon administration officials attempted to resolve this dilemma in several ways. First, Nixon requested—and received—a massive increase in LEAA funds to support local law enforcement (Baum, 1996, p. 41; Epstein, 1977, p. 69). Second, new statistical artifacts were created in the hope that these would permit a more flattering assessment of Nixon's capacities as a crime fighter (Milakovich & Weis, 1975).<sup>6</sup> Most important, however, was the administration's identification of narcotics control—for which the federal government has significant responsibility—as a crucial anticrime weapon (Epstein, 1977).<sup>7</sup>

To explain and legitimate this new focus on drugs, administration officials argued that drug addicts commit the majority of street crimes to pay for their habits.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the evidence marshaled to support this claim was quite problematic. For example, in a well-publicized speech in 1971, Nixon claimed that drug addicts steal more than \$2 billion worth of property per year. According to the FBI, however, the total value of all property stolen in the United States that year was \$1.3 billion (Baum, 1996). Despite these kinds of problems, fighting drugs became a crucial weapon in the war on crime.<sup>9</sup>

## The Assault on Defendants' Rights

The Nixon administration's claim that crime is a consequence of “permissiveness” also had important implications for criminal and constitutional law. Under the leadership of Justice Earl Warren, the U.S. Supreme Court had strengthened the protections offered to criminal defendants throughout the 1960s. For example, in *Mapp v. Ohio* (1961), the court ruled that state police officers, like federal law enforcement agents, were, under most circumstances, obliged to obtain a search warrant before conducting a search or seizing evidence.<sup>10</sup> In *Gideon v.*

*Wainwright* (1963), the Court ruled that people accused of a crime were guaranteed the right to counsel. In *Escobedo v. Illinois* (1964), coerced confessions were deemed inadmissible. And in *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966), the Court ordered that suspects must be informed of their legal rights upon arrest and that any illegally obtained evidence would be inadmissible in the courts. Finally, under the Warren Court, defendants were permitted to argue that they had been entrapped when the idea of the crime in question originated with the police or when police conduct “fell below standards for the proper use of governmental power” (Davey, 1995, p. 106).

Many of these legal rights and protections were undermined or abandoned altogether during the Nixon era. Some of the legislation sponsored by the Nixon administration directly challenged these legal protections (Bertram, Blachman, Sharpe, & Andreas, 1996). By appointing several conservatives (including Warren Burger and William Rehnquist) to the Supreme Court, Nixon ensured that defendants’ rights were further weakened. For example, in 1973, the Burger Court undermined the Warren Court’s interpretation of the Fourth Amendment’s prohibition against unwarranted searches and seizures by ruling that if an arrest is lawful, “a search incident to the arrest requires no additional justification” (Davey, 1995, p. 124). All of these efforts to undermine criminal defendants’ rights were rooted in the notion that the excessive lenience of the criminal justice system was an important cause of crime. Although these changes in criminal and constitutional law did diminish defendants’ rights, but researchers have concluded that they did not have a demonstrable effect on the rates of arrest, conviction, or incarceration (Davey, 1995, p. 107).

## The Reagan Years

Despite the centrality of the law and order discourse to the GOP’s electoral strategy, the salience of the crime and drug issues declined dramatically following President Nixon’s departure from office in 1974. Neither President Ford nor President Carter mentioned crime-related issues in their State of the Union addresses or took much legislative action on those issues.<sup>11</sup> As a result of this inattention, both the crime and drug issues largely disappeared from national political discourse in the latter part of the 1970s.

During and after the 1980 election campaign, however, the crime issue once again assumed a central place on the national political agenda.

Candidate and President Ronald Reagan, following the trail first blazed by his conservative predecessors, lavished attention on the problem of “crime in the streets” and promised to enhance the federal government’s role in combating it. Once in office, Reagan instructed the new U.S. Attorney General, William French Smith, to establish a task force to recommend “ways in which the federal government can do more to combat violent crime” (U.S. Department of Justice, 1981, p. v) and began to pressure federal law enforcement agencies to shift their focus from white-collar offenses to street crime. By October 1981, less than 1 year into the new administration, the Justice Department announced its intention to cut in half the number of specialists assigned to identify and prosecute white-collar criminals. The Reagan administration’s crackdown on crime also explicitly excluded domestic violence on the grounds that it was “not the kind of street violence about which it was most concerned” (Davis, 1983, p. 127).

In subsequent years, President Reagan frequently returned to the topic of crime, striking all of the now-familiar conservative themes. Time and again, for example, he rejected the notion that crime and related social ills have socioeconomic causes:

Here in the richest nation in the world, where more crime is committed than in any other nation, we are told that the answer to this problem is to reduce our poverty. This isn’t the answer. . . . Government’s function is to protect society from the criminal, not the other way around. (Reagan, 1984b, p. 252)

Reagan also echoed his conservative predecessors on the putative relationship between crime and welfare. The naive view that “blocked opportunities” cause crime, Reagan suggested, led liberals to believe that the “war on poverty” would solve the problem. In fact, it is the government’s attempt to ameliorate poverty—not poverty itself—that causes crime:

By nearly every measure, the position of poor Americans worsened under the leadership of our opponents. Teenage drug use, out-of-wedlock births, and crime increased dramatically. Urban neighborhoods and schools deteriorated. Those whom the government intended to help discovered a cycle of dependency that could not be broken. Government became a drug, providing temporary relief, but addiction as well. (Reagan, 1984a, p. 1013)

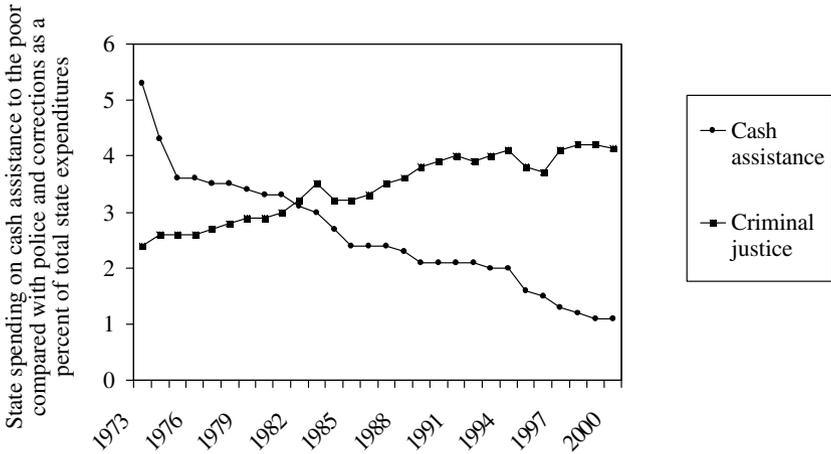
Thus, like Nixon and others before him, Reagan argued that welfare programs such as AFDC not only “keep the poor poor” but also accounted, along with lenient crime policies, for the rising crime rate. In fact, studies investigating the relationship of welfare and crime have found that greater welfare spending is associated with lower—not higher—levels of crime.<sup>12</sup>

Under Reagan, it became even more clear that conservatives sought not only electoral success, but a fundamental reconceptualization of the purpose and function of government. Administration officials argued quite explicitly that their liberal predecessors had distorted the government’s functions. The state would be on more legitimate constitutional grounds and would more effectively help the poor, they suggested, by scaling back public assistance programs and expanding the criminal justice system and law enforcement:

[T]his is precisely what we’re trying to do to the bloated Federal Government today: remove it from interfering in areas where it doesn’t belong, but at the same time strengthen its ability to perform its constitutional and legitimate functions. . . . In the area of public order and law enforcement, for example, we’re reversing a dangerous trend of the last decade. While crime was steadily increasing, the Federal commitment in terms of personnel was steadily shrinking. (Reagan, 1989, p. 238)

Reagan thus articulated the central premise of the conservative project of state reconstruction: Public assistance for the poor is an illegitimate state function; policing and social control constitute its real “constitutional” obligation (Reagan, 1984c, p. 672). The conservative mobilization of crime-related issues was thus a key component of the effort to legitimate the shift from the “welfare state” to the “security state.” This reinterpretation of governmental responsibilities has affected not only federal priorities, but state-level spending as well (see Exhibit 4.1).

Once again, conservative claims-making on the crime issue was not a response to a clear shift in public attitudes or beliefs. Prior to the Reagan administration’s renewal of the war on crime, the view that crime had its origins in welfare dependence and humankind’s propensity for evil was not widely supported. In fact, most Americans continued to attribute crime to socioeconomic conditions throughout the late 1970s and into the early 1980s. In 1981, for example, a national poll found that most Americans believed that unemployment was the main cause of



**Exhibit 4.1** State Welfare and Criminal Justice Spending

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce (1974-2001).

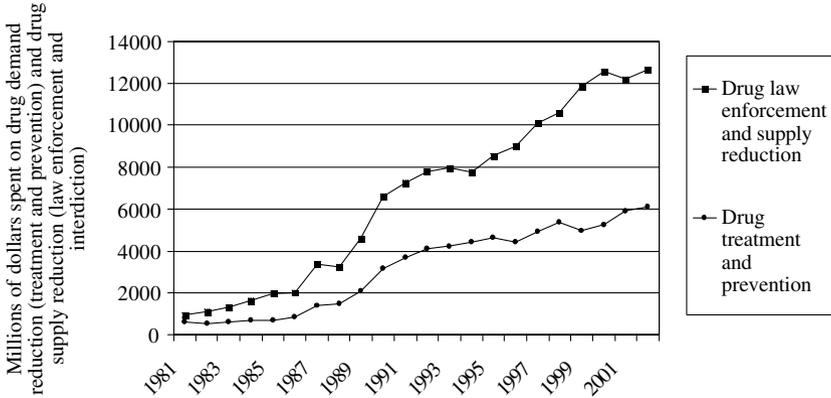
Note: Cash assistance figures for 1997-2000 calculated from U.S. Department of Commerce (1998-2001).

crime. Similarly, a 1982 ABC News Poll found that 58% of Americans saw unemployment and poverty as the most important causes of crime; only 12% identified “lenient courts” as the main source of this problem (Flanagan, 1987). As the decade progressed, however, public opinion did shift in more punitive directions.

### *From the War on Crime to the War on Drugs*

When it came time to translate its rhetoric into policy initiatives, the Reagan administration faced the same dilemma as the Nixon administration had before it: In the United States, fighting conventional street crime is primarily the responsibility of state and local government. Once again, the identification of drugs as a crucial cause of crime partially resolved this dilemma. In 1981, FBI Director William Webster announced, “The drug problem has become so widespread that the FBI must assume a larger role in attacking the problem” (“FBI Director Weighs War,” 1981, p. A27).

As a result of the Reagan administration’s renewed interest in battling drugs, federal law enforcement agencies were able to stave off the



**Exhibit 4.2** National Drug Demand and Supply Reduction Spending

SOURCE: ONDCP (1992), pp. 216-219; ONDCP (1998), Table 5; ONDCP (1999), Table 5; ONDCP (2002), Table 4.

General Accounting Office’s proposed, across-the-board budget cuts. By contrast, funding for agencies with responsibility for drug treatment, prevention, and education was sharply curtailed. By 1985, 78% of the funds allocated to the drug problem went to law enforcement; only 22% went to drug treatment and prevention (Executive Office of the President, 1990). The only agencies that fared worse than those with drug treatment and prevention responsibilities in the 1982 budget were child nutrition (down 34%), urban development action grants (down 35%), and school milk programs (down 78%) (Baum, 1996, p. 145). As illustrated in Exhibit 4.2, the Reagan administration’s early emphasis on the need for a tough approach to drugs gave law enforcement agencies a distinct advantage in the bureaucratic scramble for antidrug funds.

In sum, the Reagan administration’s emphasis on the need for a tough approach to crime facilitated the emergence of the war on drugs and shaped the nature of that campaign. The administration’s analysis of the causes of the drug problem was remarkably similar to its assessment of the crime problem: Drug use and abuse were a consequence of bad people rather than dangerous social conditions. “Narco-traffickers” and “drug pushers,” they argued, were especially evil individuals motivated solely by greed. Drug users were also individually culpable:

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If this problem is to be solved, drug users can no longer excuse themselves by blaming society. As individuals, they're responsible. The rest of us must be clear that . . . we will no longer tolerate the illegal use of drugs by anyone. (Bush, 1990, p. 624)

This belief in the importance of individual accountability also guided the recommendations made by the Department of Education under the leadership of (future drug czar) William Bennett. Students caught with drugs, Bennett argued, should be kicked out of school. Counseling these kids not only smacked of moral relativism but implied that drug abuse has root causes that are worth exploring (Baum, 1996, p. 221).

Although public opinion has not been irrelevant to the development of federal drug policy, the get-tough approach to drugs, like the war on crime before it, was not primarily a response to changes in public attitudes. As of 1981, only 3% of the American public believed that cutting the drug supply was the most important thing that could be done to reduce crime; 22% felt that reducing unemployment would be most effective. Furthermore, the percentage of poll respondents identifying drug abuse as the nation's most important problem had dropped from 20% in 1973 to 2% in 1974 and hovered between 0% and 2% until 1982. Thus, public opinion polls do not indicate that there was an upsurge in concern about drugs prior to Reagan's declaration of war, nor is there evidence of widespread support for the idea that fighting crime and drugs through tough law enforcement was the best solution to these problems (Gallup, 1990; see also Roberts, 1992).

## The Escalation of the War on Drugs

Political and media attention to "the drug issue" intensified significantly in the summer of 1986. In part, this surge in attention to the drug issue was a response to the cocaine-related deaths of athletes Len Bias and Don Rogers and the increasing visibility of the crack cocaine market. The claims-making activities of federal officials also played a key role.<sup>13</sup>

In October 1985, the DEA sent Robert Stutman to serve as the director of its New York City office. Stutman made a concerted effort to draw journalists' attention to the spread of crack. "The agents would hear me give hundreds of presentations to the media as I attempted to call attention to the drug scourge," he wrote later (Stutman, 1992, p. 148). He explains his strategy as follows:

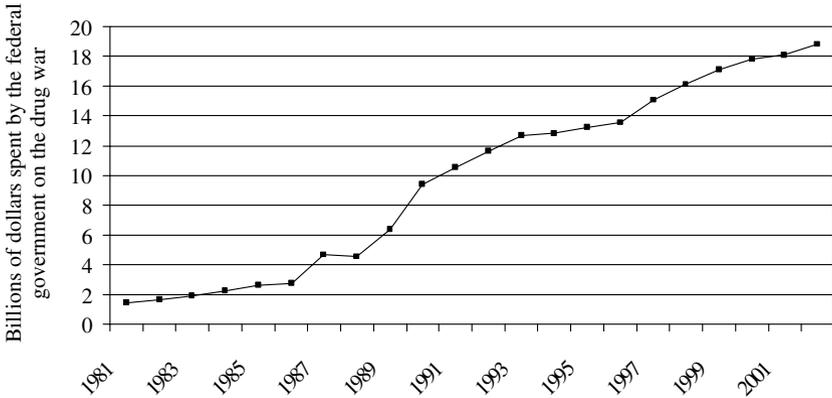
In order to convince Washington, I needed to make it [drugs] a national issue and quickly. I began a lobbying effort and I used the media. The media were only too willing to cooperate, because as far as the New York media [were] concerned, crack was the hottest combat reporting story to come along since the end of the Vietnam war. (p. 217)

This campaign appears to have been quite effective. The number of drug-related stories appearing in the *New York Times* increased from 43 in the latter half of 1985 to 220 in the second half of 1986 (Danielman & Reese, 1989). Other media outlets soon followed suit.

In an attempt to ensure that their party was perceived as taking action on the drug issue, Democrats in the House began putting together legislation calling for increased antidrug spending. In September 1986, the House passed legislation that allocated \$2 billion to the antidrug crusade for 1987, required the participation of the military in narcotics control efforts, imposed severe penalties for possession of small amounts of crack cocaine, and allowed the death penalty for some drug-related crimes and the admission of some illegally obtained evidence in drug trials. Later that month, the Senate proposed even tougher antidrug legislation, and in October, President Reagan signed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 into law. In addition to the House proposals described above, this legislation prescribed harsh mandatory minimum sentences for some drug offenses (Windelsham, 1998, p. 26).

Between 1986 and 1990, a period that bridged the administrations of Ronald Reagan and George Bush, drug use was one of the nation's most publicized issues. The 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act added more mandatory minimum sentencing statutes, including a 5-year minimum sentence for first-time offenders convicted of possessing five or more grams of crack cocaine (Windelsham, 1998, p. 26). Now, heightened public concern about drugs reached its zenith immediately following President Bush's national address in 1989, in which he focused exclusively on the drug crisis. As Exhibit 4.3 indicates, federal funds allocated to the battle against drugs grew rapidly. In fact, federal antidrug spending was greater under President Bush than under all presidents since Richard Nixon—combined.

The crime issue also enjoyed a high profile in the 1988 presidential campaign, in part as a result of George Bush, Sr.'s successful manipulation of what came to be known as the "Willie Horton" incident. Horton, a convicted murderer who had served most of his prison sentence, absconded from a Massachusetts furlough program while Michael



**Exhibit 4.3** National Drug Control Spending

SOURCE: ONDCP (1992), p. 219; ONDCP (1999), Table 5; ONDCP (2002), Table 4.

Dukakis, Bush's Democratic rival, was governor. While on the loose, Horton kidnapped a couple in Maryland and raped the woman. During the 1988 campaign, Bush and his supporters used the incident in stump speeches and television commercials to mobilize outrage about crime and blame it on "liberal Democrats" like Dukakis. As one of Bush's political operatives explained, the incident was "a wonderful mix of liberalism and a big black rapist" (Karst, 1993, pp. 73-74).

## The Triumph of Law and Order

The outbreak of the Persian Gulf War in early 1991 eclipsed domestic issues, and President Bush largely ignored crime and drugs during the 1992 campaign season. This shift probably reflects the inefficacy of the war on drugs (as indicated by increases in drug-related emergency room visits and in the overall supply of cocaine and heroin within the United States), as well as candidate Clinton's relative invulnerability on these issues.

Like many "new" Democrats, 1992 presidential hopeful Bill Clinton was determined not to suffer the fate of the previous Democratic presidential candidate, Michael Dukakis, who was portrayed by the Bush administration as hopelessly "soft on crime." As both governor and presidential candidate, Clinton expressed strong support for expanded police

efforts, more aggressive border interdiction programs, and tougher penalties for drug offenders. The 1992 Democratic platform also embraced the idea that levels of crime and drug use are a direct function of crime control efforts: “The simplest and most direct way to restore order in our cities is to put more police on the streets” (Michelowski, 1993, p. 6).

Despite his record as governor and his relatively tough talk during the election campaign, some speculated that on ascension to office, Bill Clinton would create space for alternatives to the get-tough approach. His record and campaign rhetoric were somewhat ambiguous in this regard. On one hand, Clinton emphasized the need for greater law enforcement efforts and boot camps for juvenile offenders, and he touted his record on capital punishment. (Perhaps to make the point, Clinton returned to Arkansas in the midst of the 1992 campaign to oversee the execution of a convicted killer with an IQ in the 70s.)

On the other hand, both before and after the election, Clinton occasionally evinced glimmers of a more sociological analysis of the crime problem. For example, in a speech to the Democratic Leadership Council shortly after the Los Angeles riots, Clinton characterized looters as people whose “lives and bond to the larger community had been shredded by the hard knife of experience.” He also criticized the Reagan-Bush administrations for blaming crime problems on “them”—poor, nonwhite Americans. A year after the election, Clinton still, at least occasionally, expressed these views:

We have to rebuild families and communities in this country. We’ve got to take more responsibility for these little kids before they grow up and start shooting each other. I know the budget is tight, but I’m telling you, we have to deal with family, community and education, and find jobs for members of society’s underclass to bring structure to their lives. (“Clinton Nurtures High Hopes,” 1993, p. 2794)

In short, Clinton and his deputies sometimes espoused the notion that crime and drug abuse are related to social conditions, giving some observers hope that the new administration would advocate alternative approaches to these problems.

This potential was not realized. In August 1993, Republicans announced an anticrime legislative package calling for increased federal aid for local law enforcement, enhanced federal support for prison construction for states willing to adopt “truth-in-sentencing” provisions,

more mandatory minimum penalties, and new restrictions on the federal appeals process for death row inmates. One week later, Clinton and several key congressional Democrats proposed their own anticrime legislation, calling for much the same. The only meaningful differences between the two parties' proposals were their positions on gun control, crime prevention programs, and the requirement that federal aid to local law enforcement be used to bolster community policing efforts (all of which the Democrats favored and the Republicans opposed) (Idelson, 1993; Windelsham, 1998, p. 31). Although these differences are not insignificant,<sup>14</sup> both parties overwhelmingly emphasized the need to spend more on police and prisons. Only the Congressional Black Caucus developed anticrime proposals oriented toward a radically different goal: to "prevent crime [by making social investments, particularly in urban areas] and reform the criminal justice system to make it more fair" (Windelsham, 1998, p. 50).<sup>15</sup>

The publicity associated with these legislative proposals appears to have had an impact on public concern about crime. The percentage of those polled who felt that crime was the nation's most important problem increased from 9% in June 1993 (when Republican legislators announced their new campaign) to 22% in October and to 32% by January 1994 (Public Opinion Survey, 1994).<sup>16</sup> Attention to the crime issue increased still further when President Clinton used his 1994 State of the Union address to urge more congressional action, including the adoption of a federal equivalent of California's three-strikes law (which made life imprisonment mandatory for three-time convicts). Later that year, a national poll found that 72% of the voters endorsed these three-strikes provisions; 28% opposed them (Windelsham, 1998, p. 68). Most Democrats—pleased with new poll results indicating that Republicans no longer enjoyed an advantage on the crime issue<sup>17</sup>—continued to support the expansion of the criminal justice system while offering only tepid criticism of some mandatory sentencing provisions and mild support for some preventive measures (Idelson, 1994).<sup>18</sup>

The final version of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 authorized \$6.9 billion for crime prevention efforts, \$13.8 billion for law enforcement, and \$9.8 billion for state prison construction. The cost of the bill, originally estimated at \$5.9 billion, was now estimated to be \$30.2 billion (Idelson, 1995). The legislation was sent to President Clinton in August 1994 and was hailed as a victory for the Democrats, who "were able to wrest the crime issue from the Republicans and make it their own" (Masci, 1994, p. 271).

With Republicans demanding still-tougher solutions to the crime problem, House and Senate campaigns in the fall of 1994 focused more on crime than on any other issue. In Florida, gubernatorial candidate (and brother of the current president) Jeb Bush called for corporal punishment of the sort practiced in Singapore. On the television program *Meet the Press*, Texas Senator Phil Graham promised a “real crime bill” that “grabs violent criminals by the throat, puts them in prison, and that stops building prisons like Holiday Inns.” In North Carolina, congressional candidate Fredrick Kenneth Heineman urged that provisions of the North American Free Trade Agreement be used to export U.S. criminals to Mexico, “where they can be warehoused more cheaply” (Sasson, 1995b, p. 165).

Under the leadership of then-House Minority leader Newt Gingrich, the Republican Party enthusiastically announced its “Contract With America”—including new anticrime proposals. This legislative package proposed further strengthening truth-in-sentencing, mandatory minimum sentencing, and death penalty provisions and weakening restrictions on the admission of illegally obtained evidence. In addition, the Republicans proposed eliminating funding for all preventive measures. Privately, Republicans justified this move by expressing doubt regarding the efficacy of crime prevention programs and by pointing out that their main beneficiaries were the urban poor—a group famous for its loyalty to the Democratic Party (Windelsham, 1998).

The goals advanced in the Contract With America were subsequently embodied in a series of bills passed easily in the House in February 1995. Although President Clinton and the Democrats did manage to retain separate funds for community policing efforts and the ban on assault weapons, the 1996 legislation largely embodied the get-tough approach to crime and decimated federal support for crime prevention programs. Asked to explain President Clinton’s failure to provide any real alternative to these proposals, one administration official said, “You can’t appear soft on crime when crime hysteria is sweeping the country. Maybe the national temper will change, and maybe, if it does, we’ll do it right later” (Kramer, 1994, p. 29). Since that time, few congressional representatives have been willing to deviate from the bipartisan consensus in favor of “getting tough.”

During this period, both the federal government and many states passed punitive laws that not only subjected offenders—especially drug offenders—to long sentences, but also imposed sanctions that begin when the sentence runs out. One federal law denied convicts the right to

live in—or even to visit relatives in—public housing. Another denied any person convicted of a drug felony of the right to welfare benefits, including food stamps, for the rest of his or her life. And many states adopted laws that denied felons the right to vote, sometimes for life. (As of 2002, an estimated 3.9 million Americans, including 13% of African American men, are disenfranchised as a result of such laws, a development that shaped the outcome of the presidential elections of 2000.) Some jobs—such as plumbing, real estate, and barbering—were also deemed off-limits by some states for offenders following their release. Although the intent of these laws was to deter offenders and protect the public, many experts are concerned that their main effect has been to make it more difficult for released prisoners to establish a conventional life (Butterfield, 2002a).

## Expanding the War on Crime

Early in the 21st century, the war on crime is expanding in new ways. Just 6 weeks after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center, Congress passed one of the broadest anticrime bills in American history. The USA Patriot Act (short for Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) was passed on October 26, 2001, at the height of the anthrax scare, a time when many legislators did not even have access to their offices. Not too surprisingly, the statute was adopted without much debate, despite the fact that the 342-page document amended a wide array of federal statutes covering everything from immigration law to privacy for library and bookstore patrons. Some of the more controversial provisions of the Patriot Act:

- Broaden the definition of terrorism to include any act not committed for personal gain in which a weapon or dangerous device is used. Under this definition, those involved in a barroom brawl may be guilty of terrorism (Cole, 2002).
- Define the provision of aid to any group deemed terrorist by the U.S. government as terrorist activity. Under this definition, provision of schoolbooks to many South African antiapartheid groups in the 1980s would have constituted “terrorist activity,” as many such groups—including the Party of Nelson Mandela, the African National Congress—were deemed terrorist by U.S. authorities (Solomon, 2002).

- Enable the U.S. Attorney General to detain noncitizens (and in some instances, U.S. citizens who are also citizens of other countries) indefinitely by stating that there are “reasonable grounds to believe that they are engaged in terrorist activity.” These grounds cannot be contested by those detained, and detainees do not have the right to legal counsel or even family visitation. As of October 2002, between 1,500 and 2,000 people have been detained in the search for terrorists. None of the detainees has been charged in connection with the attacks of September 11, 2001, although many have been deported for minor violations of immigration regulations (Cole, 2002).
- Allow the government to conduct “roving” (moving) wiretaps and searches without establishing probable cause of a crime. Among other things, this means that library officials and booksellers are obligated to hand over patron records to law enforcement officials without “probable cause” that the suspect is engaged in terrorist activity. Librarians and booksellers are also prohibited from informing their patrons that they are being investigated (Cole, 2002).

Of course, many other provisions of the USA Patriot Act have stirred up controversy. Belated concern about aspects of the bill led various congressional committees to hold hearings on aspects of the bill *after* its adoption. Government surveillance of U.S. residents who gather at religious services or political events has been particularly alarming to some (Minow, 2002). But so far, neither Democrats nor Republicans in Congress have been willing to challenge the bill in any sustained manner. The fear of being labeled “soft on terror” now stifles debate in much the same way that the fear of being seen as “soft on crime” has for decades.

Even as the country recovered from the attacks of September 11, 2001, a new crime-related scandal burst onto the front pages, this time featuring allegations of misconduct in the boardrooms of some of the nation’s most prominent Fortune 500 firms. In these cases, high-ranking executives were accused of knowingly “cooking the books” in order to overstate the profitability of their companies. Knowing the real deal, these insiders then sold their stock at high prices, leaving employees to incur the hit when stock values subsequently plummeted. Some employees lost not only their jobs, but also, in some cases, their entire retirement savings. As revelations of this and other kinds of corporate fraud rocked the country, Congress passed legislation that increased the penalty for

some kinds of corporate fraud from 5 to 25 years. As in previous years, fear of opposing what seemed to be a tide of public outrage led many representatives to vote for a bill about which they had many reservations. As one senator said, “Nobody wants to get out ahead of that get-tough train” (Johnson, 2002, p. 454).

The seeming severity of the increased penalties for some forms of criminal fraud has left some wondering if tough criminal sanctions will be any more successful in deterring corporate crime than they have been in deterring street crime (Johnson, 2002). Whatever the answer may be, fears that corporate executives are being highly—and overly—criminalized seem misplaced. Much corporate misconduct is not prohibited by criminal law, and the prison and jail populations remain overwhelmingly poor and disproportionately nonwhite—and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, the financial price tag of corporate crime far exceeds that of street crime. According to a recent FBI estimate, the combined cost of burglary and robbery is \$4 billion a year. By contrast, the annual cost of white-collar fraud is thought to be around \$200 billion (Simpson, 2002). Estimates of the cost of white-collar crime would undoubtedly be much higher if more corporate misconduct was defined as a crime in the first place. As one scholar recently put it, “The biggest scandal of all is how much bad [corporate] behavior is perfectly legal” (Johnson, 2002, p. 458).

In short, both the scope of the war on crime and the federal government’s role in it have expanded significantly as a result of the increased federal involvement in the war on crime, as well as congressional action against terrorism and corporate crime. At the same time, some state governments are quietly attempting to undo some of the more draconian and extreme aspects of the get-tough approach to crime and drugs.

During the legislative season of 2001, for example, state governments across the country adopted legislation that either slowed or reversed tough sentencing policies in an effort to reduce levels of incarceration. These efforts took different forms: Five states expanded drug treatment programs that provide judges with alternative sentencing options, four states revised mandatory sentencing laws, and seven states passed legislation designed to ease prison overcrowding (Sentencing Project, n.d.). Declining levels of crime, concern about the massive numbers of released felons reentering the work force with little education and few skills, and decreasing tax revenues and worsening budget crises all seem to have fueled support for these measures (King & Mauer, 2002b; see also Butterfield, 2001; Kasindorf, 2002).

In the fall of 2002, faced with very serious budget deficits, many states began to take more drastic measures to reduce prison populations and cut correctional costs. In Oklahoma, for example, Republican Governor Frank Keating asked the Pardon and Parole Board to find a way to release 1,000 nonviolent inmates. Looking for ways to make an even more significant impact on the state budget, several other states are considering overhauling draconian drug laws passed in previous decades (King & Mauer, 2002b; see also Butterfield, 2001; Kasindorf, 2002). By contrast, national political leaders, including congressional representatives, remain committed to the war on crime and have refused to modify the harsh sentencing provisions of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 or repeal tough mandatory minimums for other offenses. Consequently, the federal prison population continues to grow quite rapidly while the number of state prisoners is stabilizing. In the year 2000, the state prison population increased by 0.3%, whereas the federal prison population grew by 8% (Sentencing Project, n.d.-f).

### *Conclusion*

Beginning in the 1960s, conservative politicians at the national level began to focus an unusual degree of attention on the problem of street crime. That they did so is somewhat surprising: Not only is the capacity of federal government officials to respond to this type of crime fairly limited, but there was no indication that public concern about crime had increased or that the public believed that getting tough was the best way to address this problem. Similarly, in the 1980s, conservatives called for the wars on crime and drugs *before* the public demonstrated any increased desire for such measures. These politicians made law and order a centerpiece of their political platforms, promoted the view that these social ills stem from permissiveness in the forms of criminal justice leniency and welfare dependency, and argued for tough criminal justice and welfare policies in order to address the problem.

If not a response to clear public demands to “get tough” on crime, how can the rise of the crime issue to the center of the political stage be explained? The conservative initiative on these issues was part of a larger effort to forge a new Republican electoral majority following the collapse of the New Deal coalition. Doing so involved reaching out to formerly Democratic, white voters who had been alienated by the (belated and reluctant) Democratic embrace of the civil rights cause. Rhetoric about the collapse of law and order, crime in the streets, and

the need for strength in the face of chaos proved to be a successful means of doing so.

Conservative initiative on the crime issue has also been aimed at shifting the government's role and responsibilities from the provision of social welfare toward the protection of personal security. The get-tough policies that have resulted from this campaign are not supported by the findings of most sociological research, which suggest that severity of punishment does not have a significant deterrent effect and that welfare spending reduces rather than increases crime. Nevertheless, these policies have been largely supported by both Republican and Democratic politicians for complex political reasons, and, to a significant extent, by members of the public. In the following chapters, we turn our attention to the mass media and their role in fueling support for the war on crime and drugs.