

CRIME

The authorities, the population and the social researcher are all interested in the subject of the distribution of crime. Crime is a phenomenon that is very difficult to measure; the most complete statistics on the subject are those of the police. Taken altogether from the different police forces, these include all offences perpetrated, i.e.:

- all offences defined by the ordinary penal code, apart from indictment for injuries by negligence (as far as the author is known);
- all offences defined by the military penal code;
- all infringements of the following special laws: the law relating to arms (3.1.1933); the law relating to illicit traffic in drugs (24.2.1921); the law on printed papers, etc. having the appearance of bank notes or securities (19.6.1889); the law on hijacking (3.1.1973);
- sabotage, terrorism.

The offences are divided into serious, minor and "other" categories and the maps do not depict those of the minor category. Considered at the level of the commune, this information presents some interesting spatial patterns. The object of this map sheet is to provide a clear general view of regions with problems and those that have a lower incidence of crime. On the maps the mean value for 1984-1985 is given each time: 1984 is the first year for which complete police statistics are available. A very low figure for crime is reported from several communes, which may result from random annual causes. The calculation of a mean over two years gives a more satisfactory figure.

The main map A shows the total distribution of crime figures. Here are also represented the absolute numbers of offences and the crime rate (the number of offences per 10000 population) and also the proportion of thefts and other crimes. The area of the circles is proportional to the absolute number of offences. This number is a useful norm by which the work of the police force may be judged. The distribution shows a strong relationship with urbanisation.

The circles are divided into two sectors corresponding to thefts and other offences. Theft notably constitute the most important category of offences (for the country as a whole they account for 79.4% of the total number of offences). The proportion of thefts reflects regional differences. The zones with the largest number of theft offences are the following: the urban agglomerations of Brussels, Liège and Antwerp, the Campine (Kempen), the Borinage and the Charleroi region. The large towns and the regions most affected from the point of view of the economy occupy the prime position.

The sectors of the circles are coloured differently according to the crime rate in the two groups of offences - thefts and other crime. This crime rate is used at the international level as a measure of the extent of crime. The fact gives for each commune an average of the risk of "victimisation", without taking note of the presence of any temporary population. The pattern of distribution differs from that of the absolute crime figures, being corrected for population factors. Wallonia, south of the Sambre-Meuse trough, shows much higher levels; an important reason being the fact that here there are marked population increases during the tourist season. Similarly the coastal areas also display a higher degree of crime occurrences. In contrast, the remainder of the province of western Flanders, and the west and south of the province of eastern Flanders show a lower level of crime.

Maps B, C and D represent several types of offences. The surface area of the circles each time is proportional to the absolute number. The strength of the colour corresponds to the extent of crime in the group. The three varieties dealt with are, to a certain measure, an indication of the different types of crime.

Hold-ups and armed attacks (map B) constitute the most serious form of the crime. These above all occur in the big towns. The dense population rectangle Antwerp-Ghent-Brussels-Louvain(Leuven), the Campine, the Walloon industrial axis and the Liège region, none of them remain unscathed. One surprising detail, however, is the reduced level in the Ghent area. The distribution pattern does not markedly differ from that of total crime. However, the strongest concentration of crime is in the large towns. A striking feature is that 60% of the communes have already experienced this type of crime.

The fraud group of crimes, swindling and embezzlement (map C) can be considered as "white collar crime". These offences are a more refined form of crime. It is immediately obvious, in contrast to the preceding map, that crimes are more dispersed. "White collar crime" is above all found on a high level in the urban centres, on the coast and in several Ardennes communes. This form of crime is essentially one of the town-dweller.

Thefts of cars and vehicles (map D) is the best known offence: it is effectively one of the rare recorded at nearly 100%. For the period considered 78% of the communes have been fighting this crime; less than half of these communes counted more than 5 thefts of this type per year. In the distribution of absolute values, attention is drawn to all the large towns (Liège in particular), and it is the same for the coast. The crime rate for these offences provides nearly the same picture. Here it is the French frontier region that stands out distinctly. In 1985 this form of crime had increased by 23% over that reported for 1984.

The concentration of total crimes in relation to the population is illustrated in map E. In fact this map reflects the crime rate. But by reporting percentage values and by contrasting colours, the differences between the distribution of crime and that of population are shown more clearly. The commune with high figures can be qualified as "problem communes" and therefore demand the attention of the authorities in the first instance.

Map F shows the distribution of malefactors by commune of residence, shown as a percentage of the total population. Here shown are all the known criminals without reference to the dates of offences committed. If this is compared with preceding maps, it is clear that only about 20% of all known offences have been successfully solved. There is a complementary case shown here by the residence of perpetrators of crimes whilst the other maps show the locations where the offences were committed. In general, the distribution tallies with that of the total sum of crime. However there are some marked differences. The north of the province of Antwerp, the western and south-western outskirts of Brussels, several of the Ardennes communes show reduced levels whilst the crime rate is high. In the Brussels agglomeration itself there is a slight difference between the eastern side (more offences) and the western side (more offenders). The population of the two sectors present clearly contrasting socio-economic factors, lower level to the west and higher ones to the east.

In conclusion the distribution of crime presents two basic pictures. There is that provided by the absolute number of the offences, total or by category, which closely resembles that of different facets of urbanisation. The picture given by the crime rate shows foremost those periods known to be periods in which the population has temporary augmentation. These include the tourist regions, commuter zones and areas of full employment, barracks and educational establishments. The distribution of criminals shows some analogies with the two patterns, the relationship tending to be stronger with the pattern shown by the crime rate.