Criminology Comprehensive Methods Exam Questions PART III
Doctoral Program in Criminology
School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences
University of Texas at Dallas

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Instructions
The Comprehensive Examination in Criminology consists of three sections:
 (1) Theory
 (2) Policy and
(3) Data/Methods (for students who have not passed the Qualifying Exam)

Type your assigned ID number at the top of your first page (DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME).

Each of these sections contains two (2) questions from which you will choose one (1).

You will have four (4) hours to answer the question you choose for each section.

Your answers will be evaluated on their organization, coherence, clarity, intellectual rigor, substantive validity, conceptual development, and application of relevant literature to the question at hand.

DATA/METHODS QUESTIONS (choose one):

1. Many legal scholars, criminologists, and practitioners have suggested that the pretrial detention of misdemeanor defendants poses a serious problem because it may induce otherwise innocent persons to plead guilty in order to exit jail, potentially creating widespread error in case adjudication (e.g., misdemeanor defendants detained pretrial may be subject to a higher probability of incarceration and receive longer sentences than their non-detained counterparts). A nonprofit advocacy group has hired you to examine whether there is any empirical support for these claims in Dallas County. The local sheriff and all misdemeanor court judges have agreed to provide detailed data on all misdemeanor cases resolved in the county over the past five years (hundreds of thousands of cases) as they disagree with the premise that detained defendants are more likely than similarly-situated releasees to plead guilty, be sentenced to jail, and receive longer jail sentences.

Describe in detail what your study will look like. Your answer should include the specific research questions to be addressed, the proposed research design to be implemented, how you will operationalize the key variables of interest, how you will analyze the data, and how you will address internal (e.g., what will you do to mitigate omitted variable bias) and external validity issues related to your research design. Be sure to note any possible limitations that may arise because of your research design.

2. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of (a) cross-sectional, (b) longitudinal quasi-experimental and (c) experimental study designs for determining the effectiveness of hot-spot/directed patrol policing, in terms of achieving the goals of: (1) reducing crime and (2) improving the relationship between the police and the community. Discussion of each design should elaborate on aspects of internal validity, such as how likely any observed crime reduction is attributable to the actual actions of the police. You should also discuss the external validity of each design -- how well any impact is likely to generalize to different times and/or places.

POLICY QUESTIONS (choose one):

1. One of the top policy priorities of the new administration has been a renewed focus on illegal immigration. In fact, then U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump announced his candidacy by controversially referencing immigrants and his perception that these persons were inextricably linked to criminal—especially violent--behavior. Beyond xenophobia (intense dislike or fear of people from other countries) and jingoism (extreme patriotism), what are the source of these beliefs? Based on the body of empirical research on the topic, make an argument for whether the new policies of the Trump Administration are warranted and prudent. If these policies are not prudent, what specific policy alternatives would you offer the new administration that address the etiology of the immigration-crime nexus?

2. In a recent memo, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions ordered federal prosecutors to "charge and pursue the most serious, readily provable offense" which represents a sharp policy contrast to the lessening of mandatory and harsh sentences under the Obama administration, especially regarding low-level drug crimes. The policy cuts right to the issue of the mandatory minimum sentences that were levied at drug offenders during the crack epidemic of the 1980s. Based on the accumulated empirical evidence surrounding mandatory minimums, discuss: (1) the intended and unintended consequences of the mandatory minimum policies of the 1980s on crime and prison populations; (2) how the policy changes of the Obama administration—notably Former Attorney General Eric Holder—changed crime and prison populations; and (3) whether the revised policy put forth by Sessions represents prudent public policy. Be sure to support your responses.