

## **The Economic Dimension of Crime in the Arab World**

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### **Abstract**

In this study, we attempted to have a better applied and statistical understanding of the relationship between the different economic determinants (poverty, unemployment, economic inequality) and the different types of committed crimes in the Arab countries over a period of two decades. The results revealed that seeking economic development is considered an important requirement to reduce crime rates. Indeed, it is viewed as one of the solutions that mainly contribute to avoiding punitive inflation experienced in all Arab countries without exception. The research concludes that the Arab countries suffer from a noticeable increase in the number of committed crimes, with all their types, such as murder, robbery, and drug crimes. Unemployment represents the main economic factor affecting the increased crime rates in Arab countries, and the increased rate of poverty is positively correlated with the high rates of robbery and drug crimes. In light of the results, the study recommends using the domains of scientific research in a way that serves social and economic development and reduces the prevalence of negative phenomena, making more efforts to find social policies that help reduce economic problems, as well as establishing monitor centers concerned with monitoring and studying the negative phenomena in the community.

**Keywords :** Economic Dimension, Arab World, Crime.

### **Introduction**

Over a century, delinquents have been interested in the possible effect of the economy on developing delinquent and criminal behaviors in communities. However, criminology's interest in the economy wasn't a direct one. In this context, the economy may lead to wealth, more jobs, and equality, or conversely, it may lead to poverty, unemployment, and inequality. Over the years, these factors were related

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to the development of delinquency and crimes. Hence, the different theories make it possible to explain the development of crime and transmitting towards the criminal behavior based on the economic context of a country, area, or neighborhood.

In this vein, the Arab world witnessed periods of political and economic recession, where international economic sanctions were imposed on some Arabic countries, while other Arabic countries employed ascetic economic policies. Indeed, all these factors adversely affected large groups in the community which, in turn, resulted in the prevalence of several social and economic phenomena, including poverty, unemployment, and economic inequality, and contributed to the emergence of several types of social delinquency- a phenomenon that threatened all the individuals in the community.

The economic situation of countries represents one of the most important factors that support security and social situations, where it reflects the individuals' ability to satisfy daily life requirements by earning a sufficient income. Therefore, if any defect takes place in this situation, individuals may resort to illegal methods in order to satisfy their needs. Thus, we can see that the literature and previous studies relevant to economic crime mainly focused on explaining the correlation relationship between the economic variables and crime in several countries around the world. However, the scientific efforts made by some Arab countries were relatively marginal, where those studies were only conducted to demonstrate the statistical data or mainly aimed to reveal newly issued data. Indeed, this could mean that the actual scientific results related to the rates of crime will be more focused on America and European countries. Therefore, this study was conducted in order to simulate the Western countries' research in this domain and explain the causes of change in crime rates by analyzing the temporal relationship of crime rates with economic factors based on an investigation of some Arab countries, particularly Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia. By doing so, we can answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the economic factors determining crime in the Arab countries?
- 2) How can we take into consideration the effects of economic defects, such as poverty, unemployment, and economic inequality on the different models of crimes?

Undoubtedly, investigating the impact of economic variables on crime rates in Arab countries leads to the achievement of several practical and scientific advantages. On the one hand, the current study will contribute to bridging the gap resulting from not testing the long-term statistical relationship between the basic

economic variables, such as poverty, unemployment, and the various types of economic inequality. On the other hand, this study is expected to help decision-makers cite scientific bases that enable communities to encounter the phenomenon of crime without excessive usage of criminal penalties, but by using alternative social policies.

Crime has always been considered a distinctive domain for scientific research among legal scholars, sociologists, psychologists, and economists, where they contributed to shedding more light on the effect of social control with its broad meaning on the development of delinquency and crime. Since the emergence of the works of (Becker, 1968) and (Ehrlich, 1973), economists developed useful statistical methods in order to perform more accurate evaluations for the analysis of causal correlations between the social and economic variables that are beneficial in studying the cases of crime and delinquency (Denis, et al 2004).

Since criminal activities are too costly for all countries, in terms of social and economic domains, it is necessary to identify their causes in order to reduce their occurrence and find effective policies that would prevent their prevalence in the community. Therefore, scholars proposed much applied research that used the statistical methods of economists in order to surpass the analysis frame performed by (Becker), given its limited range, as he only addressed a certain context<sup>5</sup>, which is the United States of America. Furthermore, researchers continued to apply their studies based on the case studies of the USA or some Western countries, while the Arabic region studies were viewed as marginal. In this study, we will address the most important economic theories that aimed to explain crime as well as the applied studies that addressed the impact of economic factors on crime in Arabic and Western countries according to the following (Gould et al, 2002):

**A) Economic theory in explaining the criminal phenomenon.**

At the international level, there are two opposing perspectives. The first one is related to modernization theory, which is taken from the work of (Durkheim, 1983), where it confirms that rapid social change may result in divisions in traditional values which, in turn, results in an increase in crime rates. The second theory took the opposite side, where it suggested that crime rates decline as a country gains more economic development.

Furthermore, the most prominent economic theories that attempted to explain the relationship between the economic variables and crime are referred to

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<sup>5</sup>See these studies:

- Machin, S. et C. Meghir (2000) : "Crime and Economic Incentives", The Institute for Fiscal Studies Working Paper no. 00/17, London, à paraître dans *The Journal of Human Resources*.

Marx (1818-1883) and Engels (1820-1895) in 1850, known as the economic theory in explaining crime. This theory confirmed that crime results from some economic factors, including poverty and unemployment. The supporters of this theory depended on some statistical studies conducted by sociologists and criminologists to demonstrate the relationship between economic conditions and crime, particularly among juveniles. They also relied on the official data which reveals that crimes are more common during economic crises.

Indeed, this theory gained more support in the late 1800s, with the emergence of the Socialism system, headed by Marx who noticed that there was a considerable increase in crime rates, particularly money crimes at that time. The theory postulated that economic factors have a great effect on the lives of individuals and the community. The supporters of this theory suggested that crime is an inevitable result of exploiting the working class and that the justice applied in the capitalist community is in favor of the capitalist class. Therefore, disadvantaged individuals, who have feelings of oppression and unfairness, will be motivated to commit criminal acts, thinking that they are not mistaken and that they only take their due rights (Alexandros and Nikolaos, 2010).

Furthermore, people belonging to the disadvantaged classes in the community think that most rich people in the community have collected their wealth at the expense of the other marginalized classes in the community. Therefore, poor people will attempt to steal from the rich ones, justifying that by regaining their robbed rights. Also, the poor and unemployed people go against the prevailing criminal laws and social situations, if rich people have their own methods for getting rid of criminal penalties. Indeed, too many individuals within the poor and working classes think that laws were enshrined to be implemented on the poor ones since they lack the social power that is closely related to the prevailing economic situation (Fatih-Allah, 2023).

The most prominent scholar who cited the previous ideas is Bonger (1876-1940), who published those ideas in his book entitled "Criminalization and Economic Circumstances" in 1905 (Bonger, 1905). In his book, he demonstrated the relationship between economic factors and crime, where he relied on the economic explanation introduced by Marx, but refused the ideas cited by the supporters of the formative approach in explaining the causes of the criminal phenomenon (Fatih-Allah, 2023).

Bungei suggested that there is a strong relationship between economic factors and crime by demonstrating the relationship between economic growth and crime. He assumed that transforming from the agricultural system to an industrial economy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was accompanied by a noticeable change in the phenomenon of crime, where crimes were characterized by violence, but with the

change towards industrial economy, they have become more characterized by fraud and artfulness.

Bungei refused the capital system, considering it as the main cause for the prevalence of the idea of people's exploitation to each other as well as exploiting children and women in work which, in turn, enhanced the ideology of class conflict in the community, and resulted in more violence, aggression and conflict by the poor, while it resulted in more arrogance by the rich. Bungei suggested that the expansion towards gaining more profits and achieving more productivity would result in more competition, losses, and unreasonable financial gains. This context has the potential to increase the occurrence of various types of robbery, slavery, immortality, and humiliation of the labor class. In fact, all these factors adversely affect the different social institutions, particularly family, school, and workplace. Also, the high population density, unhealthy conditions, low-income level as well as neglecting children- in terms of health and education lead to family disintegration, moral decay, and thus crime.

Bungei attempted to clarify the relationship between the various types of crimes and economic factors by using class conflict established by capitalism. Accordingly, he classified crimes into three groups, where each group is related to a certain social class: the bourgeoisie class, the middle class, and the working class based on the motives that resulted in the existence of each class. Therefore, crimes were classified into three basic types: economic crimes, violent crimes, and political crimes. Lately, he added sexual crimes, which aim to achieve financial gains without consideration of the prevalent ethical and social values. Indeed, the total domain of these classifications represents a direct reflection of the social, psychological, and economic circumstances that govern each class.

In sum, we can say that crime is viewed as the basic outcome of capitalism, where it mainly represents a reaction against the unfairness prevalent in capitalism. In this vein, socialism is viewed as the right alternative that has the potential to eliminate all social problems, including crime (Fatih-Allah, 2023).

(Trasler, 1964) is considered one of the economists who adopted the economic explanation in explaining the criminal phenomenon. He suggested that crime is a rational reaction to bad economic situations, where the prevailing authoritarian systems didn't give fair opportunities to community members. Therefore, the criminal justice system in that community is designed to protect the interests of the rich people, and the class discrimination that police officers and courts practice against the poor is responsible for the committed violent crimes.

Krisberg (1975) in his book "Crime and Privilege: Toward a New Criminology", adopted the economic entrance in explaining the phenomenon of criminalization, where he suggested that the crimes committed by the different

social classes reflected the unfair distribution of power and the privileges that developed in the light of the political, social and economic relationships of unfair economic systems, and that such systems were responsible for the crimes that took place in the community, considering them as systems that increased unemployment rates, increased the numbers of socially and economically marginalized individuals, and exacerbated family disintegration and illegal behaviors among the community members.

**B) Applied studies explaining the impact of economic factors on crime.**

The results of reviewing the previous studies and literature revealed that there are no studies that directly addressed the impact of economic variables on criminal behavior by using the methodology of analysis of time series. Conversely, the foreign studies, considerably, used this statistical method. Therefore, this study attempted to make use of the data mentioned in those studies to investigate the case in the Arab countries. Here is a display of the most important studies:

Abdul-Razzaq and Al-Wreikat (2008) conducted a study entitled "the impact of economic variables on crime in Jordan: using the joint integration analysis" which aimed to demonstrate the impact of some economic variables on crime in Jordan during (1973- 2006). The study identified the role of and the level of real national income in committing crimes using the approach of error correction. The required data were obtained from the Directorate of Public Security, the Department of general statistics, and the reports of the Central Bank. The study used the test of unit root to determine the degree of integration between variables, and Johansen-Julius approach to test whether there is a relationship between the variables.

The results of statistical analysis revealed that the variables are totally integrated in the long run. Also, the results of the error correction model, impulse response function, and variance analysis revealed that there is a positive relationship between the rates of unemployment and crime and a negative relationship between real income level and crime.

Abdul-Salam (2005) conducted a study entitled "Crime-economics, the economic determinants of crime: a comparative study applied to a sample of inmates in one of the Egyptian prisons" which aimed to identify the economic factors of crime in Cairo Central Prison. The study sample consisted of (322) prisoners who were selected using simple random sampling. The results revealed that (62%) of the respondents committed crimes due to financial needs. The results revealed that issuing a cheque without an account was the common crime, while the crimes of robbery, drug abuse, and murder were the most common crime patterns.

Al-Bakir, (2002) conducted a study entitled "the relationship between unemployment rates and crime rates in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia". This study was based on the data from population statistics in 1992. The study used the method of Least Squares in estimating the relationship between the study variables. The results revealed that there is a strong positive relationship between unemployment rates and crime rates in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Al-Swaidi (2001) conducted a study entitled "the economic factors and Their Impact on criminalization in the United Arab Emirates" which aimed to investigate the economic factors and their effect on crime in the United Arab Emirates. The results revealed that several factors, including poverty, unemployment, and economic changes lead to committing criminal behaviors. The results revealed that there is a strong relationship between economic factors and criminal behavior, where those factors provoke individuals to commit different types of crimes. Also, there is an effect of the economic changes on the criminal behavior in the community, where converting from one economic pattern to another: for example, from agriculture to industry, results in the emergence of new criminal patterns in the community, such as the crimes of murder, burglary, robbery, and rape.

Ajwa (2001) entitled "the relationship between the Rates of Unemployment and Crime in the Arab World". This study was applied in Tunisia, Egypt, and Sudan on (861) respondents. The results revealed that the employees' low income and being fired from work evoke them to commit crimes. Also, the depressed feelings experienced by the unemployed lead to committing drug crimes.

Several studies conducted in Western countries revealed the direct effect of the different economic factors on crime. Here are some of these studies:

Papps, and Winkelmann (2007) conducted a study entitled "Investigating the causal relationship between Unemployment and crime in the Netherlands". This study used fixed and random effect models based on local time series (1996-2005). The results revealed that there is an insignificant relationship between unemployment rates and money crimes.

Schuller (2006) conducted a study entitled "the relationship between Unemployment and Crime in Sweden". This study used several approaches to statistical analysis. The first approach used time series data during (1988-2004), while the second approach used cross-sectional data during (1995-2003). The results of the first analytical approach revealed that there is a positive effect of the increased rates of employment on the levels of crime, while the results of the second analytical approach revealed that there is no relationship between the rates of unemployment and crime.

Nilsson and Agell (2003) conducted a study entitled "the relationship between Unemployment and Crime in Sweden". The study included the crimes of robbery and drug possession committed during (1996-2000). The study used the Panel Data Model to estimate the relationship between crime and unemployment, poverty, and other socio-economic variables. The results revealed that there is a positive relationship between unemployment, robbery crimes, and drug possession. The results revealed that the decline in unemployment rates during the 1990s contributed to decreasing the number of robbery cases, whereas the low salaries contributed to increasing crime rates.

The fourth study is entitled "The Impact of income level on the Rates of Crimes". This study aimed to analyze the causal relationship between the income level represented by the Gini coefficient and the crimes of property robbery and home burglary (1961-1997). The study used the approach of joint integration in America, Britain, and Italy. The results revealed that the variant income levels led to crimes in Italy. However, that relationship didn't apply to America and Britain.

### **C) The applied analysis for the impact of the economic factors on crime rates**

We previously mentioned the relative paucity of applied studies that addressed the impact of economic factors on the rates of crime in the Arab World using the statistical methods of time series. This part of the study aims to contribute to bridging this scientific gap by analyzing the impact of economic factors on the various types of crime in Arab countries. The data of statistical analysis are related to (7) Arab countries that were observed during (1900-2010), including Jordan, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Lebanon, Morocco, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The selected period represents a period of relative stability for these countries which, in turn, allows obtaining the most reliable statistical data.

In this study, we will perform an analysis based on two stages. In the first stage, there will be a descriptive analysis for all the indices that were kept in the analysis, and in the second stage, we will attempt to estimate a statistical model that allows measuring the impact of these factors on the pre-mentioned crime categories.

### **Methodology**

The study used the descriptive approach based on an office survey of several Arabic and English references, reports, and periodicals. The study also used the analytical approach to analyze the statistical data as well as financial and economic indices in order to conclude and discuss the study results.



In order to answer the study's questions, we have to consider two main domains. The first domain is the theoretical framework which aims at demonstrating the basic economic theories that were cited in the literature on criminal economy and conducting an official survey for some Arabic and foreign applied previous studies to project their manifestations in the context of Arab countries. The second domain included the applied framework that depends on the analysis of the time series of the investigated study variables according to the following plan:

#### A) The descriptive statistical analysis of the used data

Before performing the descriptive analysis of the statistical data used in this study, it is worth mentioning that the study variables were collected from different resources. Also, all these resources and data were demonstrated in detail in a previous study that addressed a different scientific context, particularly about the social structure of the criminal penalty (AbdalRahman, 2017)<sup>6</sup>. We concluded the necessity of utilizing those data to analyze them and identify the economic dimension of crime in Arab countries.

The first step of the applied approach is represented by displaying the descriptive statistics for the indicators used in the statistical analysis, where Table (1) shows the descriptive statistics of the study variables.

Table (1)

The descriptive statistics (the total sample during (1990-2010))

	Mean	SD	Highest limit	Lowest limit
<b>Number of total crimes</b>	927.53	661.16	126.00	2623.00
<b>Murder crime rates</b>	1.89	1.43	0.38	7.26
<b>Robbery crime rates</b>	123.12	143.74	0.00	612.00

<sup>6</sup> For more information, see:

- ABDALRAHMAN, H.M. (2017). PEINE ET STRUCTURE SOCIALE DANS LE MONDE ARABE, THÈSE POUR L'OBTENTION DE GRADE DE DOCTEUR, Droit privé et Sciences criminelles, AIX-MARSEILLE UNIVERSITÉ, École Doctorale Sciences Juridiques et Politiques ED 67, FACULTÉ DE DROIT ET DE SCIENCE POLITIQUE, Présenté et soutenu publiquement le 20 décembre 2017. [file:///C:/Users/moely2/Downloads/171220\\_ABDALRAHMAN\\_650tsyrns572qkams288gl364xw\\_TH%20\(3\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/moely2/Downloads/171220_ABDALRAHMAN_650tsyrns572qkams288gl364xw_TH%20(3).pdf)

<b>Drug crime rates</b>	34.81	30.18	0.00	128.00
<b>Unemployment rates</b>	12.69	6.31	3.55	29.00
<b>Poverty rates</b>	2.61	1.13	0.10	6.80
<b>Gini coefficient</b>	37.75	3.25	30.9	44

The previous table shows the mean, standard deviation, lowest limit, and highest limit for each index in the study. We can see that during (1990-2010), the average mean of crimes was (927) crimes per 100.000 people, considering the big variation among countries, with a standard deviation of (661.16) per 100.000 people. The results showed that the lowest limit was (126), while the highest limit was (2.623) per 100.000 people; certainly, this difference is unusual. Unemployment has a mean of (12.69) with a standard deviation of (6.31), while poverty has a mean of (2.61) with a standard deviation of (1.3).

#### **B) Estimating the statistical model and discussing the results:**

In this part of the study, we will estimate (4) regression models to measure the impact of economic factors, such as poverty, unemployment, and the Gini coefficient on the rates of crime. To achieve this objective, we considered (4) indices of crime; these are total crime rates, murder rates, robbery rates, and drug crime rates. For each one of these indices, we will estimate a regression model by using poverty, unemployment rates, and the Gini coefficient which are considered interpretative variables as they reflect economic inequality.

In order to estimate the statistical models, we will use a fixed effect panel, while taking into account the special effects for each country as well as the time effect which is considered by including the dual variables for each year.

Table (2)

The results obtained from each estimation.

	<b>Total crime rates</b>	<b>total crimes</b>	<b>Robbery crime rates</b>	<b>Drug crime rates</b>
<b>Murder crime rates</b>	0.403 (0.689)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.180 (0.143)	0.132*** (0.040)
<b>Unemployment rates</b>	0.098 (0.086)	0.001*** (0.000)	0.110*** (0.018)	0.013*** (0.005)
<b>Gini coefficient</b>	0.804*** (0.251)	0.002*** (0.001)	0.188*** (0.052)	0.025* (0.015)
<b>Fixed effect</b>	-0.247** (0.096)	-0.036 (0.022)	-0.462** (0.199)	-0.950* (0.561)
<b>Fixed time effects</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Notes</b>	147	147	147	147
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.30	0.198	0.36	0.25

**Strong standard deviations between brackets; coefficient significance \* p<0.1, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01**

The results in the previous table revealed that there is a positive effect of unemployment on several types of crimes. The first column showed that there is a strong positive relationship between the unemployment rate and crime rate, where the regression coefficient was (0.098), which is significant at (0.01) for the investigated variables. This coefficient indicates good flexibility and refers to the percentage at which the committed crime rates increase when the unemployment rate increases by (1%). Therefore, the importance of this coefficient supports the existence of a noticeable effect of the increased rates of unemployment on the total crime rates. This finding agrees with several studies, such as (Allen, 2005) and (Donis, 2006).

Since the total crime rate is calculated with reference to several types of crimes, including murder, robbery, and drug crimes, we analyze the average effect of all the different economic factors on each crime type. The results in Table (2) revealed that there is a significant positive effect of the unemployment rate on the rate of murder and robbery crimes. This finding agrees with (Cozzi, 2003) and (Raphael, Winter-Ember, 2001). They also show a significant effect of the increased rates of poverty on the increased levels of committing drug crimes, and it is also compatible with most theoretical and applied studies (Sharkey et al 2017).

As for economic inequality, it encourages committing different types of crimes. Indeed, the results revealed that the rates of murder, robbery, and drug crimes and the total number of committed crimes increase noticeably with economic inequality, calculated based on the Gini coefficient. These findings agree with (Daniel and Stephen, 2006).

In sum, the total results taken from this study clearly showed that the economic development of a certain country is negatively related to crime; therefore, as the country's wealth (high local product, low unemployment, and poverty rates) increases, the level of committed crimes decreases noticeably (La Free and Tseloni, 2006).

### **Conclusion**

In this study, we attempted to have a better applied and statistical understanding of the relationship between the different economic determinants (poverty, unemployment, economic inequality) and the different types of committed crimes in the Arab countries over a period of two decades. The results revealed that seeking economic development is considered as an important requirement to reduce crime rates. Indeed, it is viewed as one of the solutions that mainly contribute to avoiding punitive inflation experienced in all the Arab countries. The most important results and recommendations of the study can be outlined as follows:

- The Arab countries suffer from a noticeable increase in the number of committed crimes, with all their types, such as murder, robbery, and drug crimes.
- The success of economic theory in determining the factors and causes that contribute to the emergence of criminally characterized communities.
- Unemployment represents the main economic factor affecting the increased crime rates in Arab countries.
- The increased rate of poverty is positively correlated with the high rates of robbery and drug crimes.

### Recommendations

- Using the domains of scientific research in a way that serves social and economic development and reduces the prevalence of negative phenomena.
- Doing more efforts to find social policies that help reduce the spread of unemployment and poverty in the Arab communities.
- Providing economic policies that are based on equality and justice in opportunities and choices.
- Paying attention to applied studies and research in the legal domain, without being limited to theoretical legal studies.
- Establishing monitor centers concerned with monitoring and studying the negative phenomena in the community.

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