



Why Criminals Commit Crimes

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Is it a mystery?

"I really think if we can identify the 'why,' especially amongst the juveniles, we might be able to change our approach on how to slow this down," [says](#) Carlos Heraud, an assistant chief at the DC police department.

Along with other crime in Washington, D.C., carjackings are up. Why?

Some people choose to be criminals. And some policymakers choose to aid and abet them.

It's a matter of incentives and disincentives, but also choices and character.

Since different people react differently to being born into poverty — or being disrespected, being peer-pressured, being bored, being fired — we cannot simply say that criminals are created

by difficult circumstances.

Most do not become thugs and hoodlums.

Some who make criminal choices pull back and determine to do better. Others commit offenses forever. Chief Heraud and D.C. mayors and lawmakers should heed the insights of Stanton Samenow's [Inside the Criminal Mind](#). Although criminals make excuses for themselves and latch onto the excuses made for them by others, they know they're responsible for their actions.

But while circumstances don't create the criminal mind, circumstances can *abet* crime. For example, if you make it easier for criminals to get away with assault and theft, they'll likely commit more assaults and thefts.

The government of our imperial capital makes it [hard](#) for potential victims to arm themselves, [easy](#) for criminals who are "caught" to walk away. If you're a criminal operating in a town like that, it'd have to be encouraging to receive by this kind of encouragement?

After all, it's not a question of bad incentives incentivizing *all* to be wicked. The effects can be seen on the margin, among those most likely to be induced by corrupt incentives, or to not be dissuaded from criminal action by reduced disincentives.

No great mystery.

This is Common Sense. I'm Paul Jacob.