

The gender gap in conviction statistics in Sweden, 1840-2010

Robin Camenius

Department of Criminology, Stockholm University

My study

- The aim is to map out gender differences in conviction data, especially concerning trends in the gender gap in crime ...
- ... and to discuss these trends in relation to whether the development is due to (a) changes in actual crime levels or (b) societal reaction to crime
- Material: national conviction data (every tenth year 1840-2010). This enables a study on both (a) the long-term development as well as (b) a more detailed analysis of certain short-term trends.

The emancipation hypothesis (Adler 1975, Simon 1975; 1976)

Empirical fact: Increased arrest rate among women in the US (1960-1970's)

Explanation: The women's rights movement of the 60's has rapidly changed social and economic opportunities among women → less social control and increased opportunities to commit crimes.

Prediction: Women's crime levels will in time "emulate" that of men (the "dark side of equality").

"Women have lost more than their chains. For better or worse, they have lost many of the restraints which kept them within the law" (Adler, 1975: 24)

Theoretical underpinnings

- The emancipation hypothesis (behaviour)

Womens crime are on the rise given the development towards increased equality. The gender gap should be narrowing over time due to structural behavioural changes among women, resulting in increased crime rates.

(See Adler 1975, Simon 1975; 1976)

- Societal reaction (reaction)

The increasing proportion of female offenders is a consequence of changes in societal reaction to crime. Women's crime levels are (more or less) stable when looking at alternative data sources (victim surveys, hospital data etc.).

(See for example Steffensmeier & Streifel 1992, Lauritsen et al 2009)

Crime categories

Violent crimes

- Murder, manslaughter, assault, assault/threat against officer, robbery ...

Theft / economic crimes

- Larceny, theft, GTA, counterfeiting, embezzlement, tax evasion ...

Sexual offences

- crimes of extramarital sexual intercourse, infanticide (barnamord), criminal abortion, homosexuality (1840-1940)
- Rape, sexual exploitation, molestation, procuring (koppleri) (1840-2010)

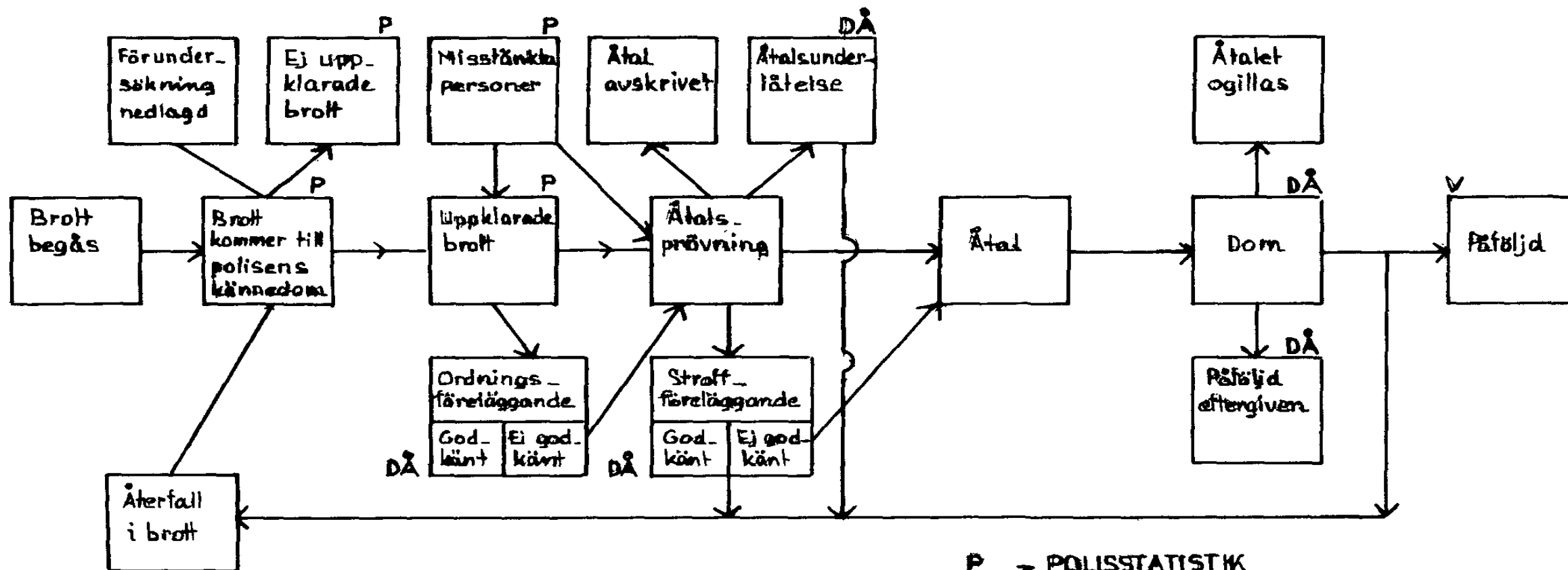
What is conviction data a measure of?

Conviction statistics are sensitive to changes in ...

- i) Statistical routines regarding how offences/persons are counted etc.
- ii) Legal factors, such as the efficiency of the criminal justice system, expansion/contraction of legal definitions etc.
- iii) Substantive factors: Actual crime levels, propensity to report crimes and so on.

My stance: Although the level of crime remains unknown, conviction data can be used to study trends/development. Conviction data can therefore be used to study both crime and societal reaction. (See Von Hofer 2006)

Schema över de delar av det rättsliga förloppet från brott till påföljd som berörs av kriminalstatistiken



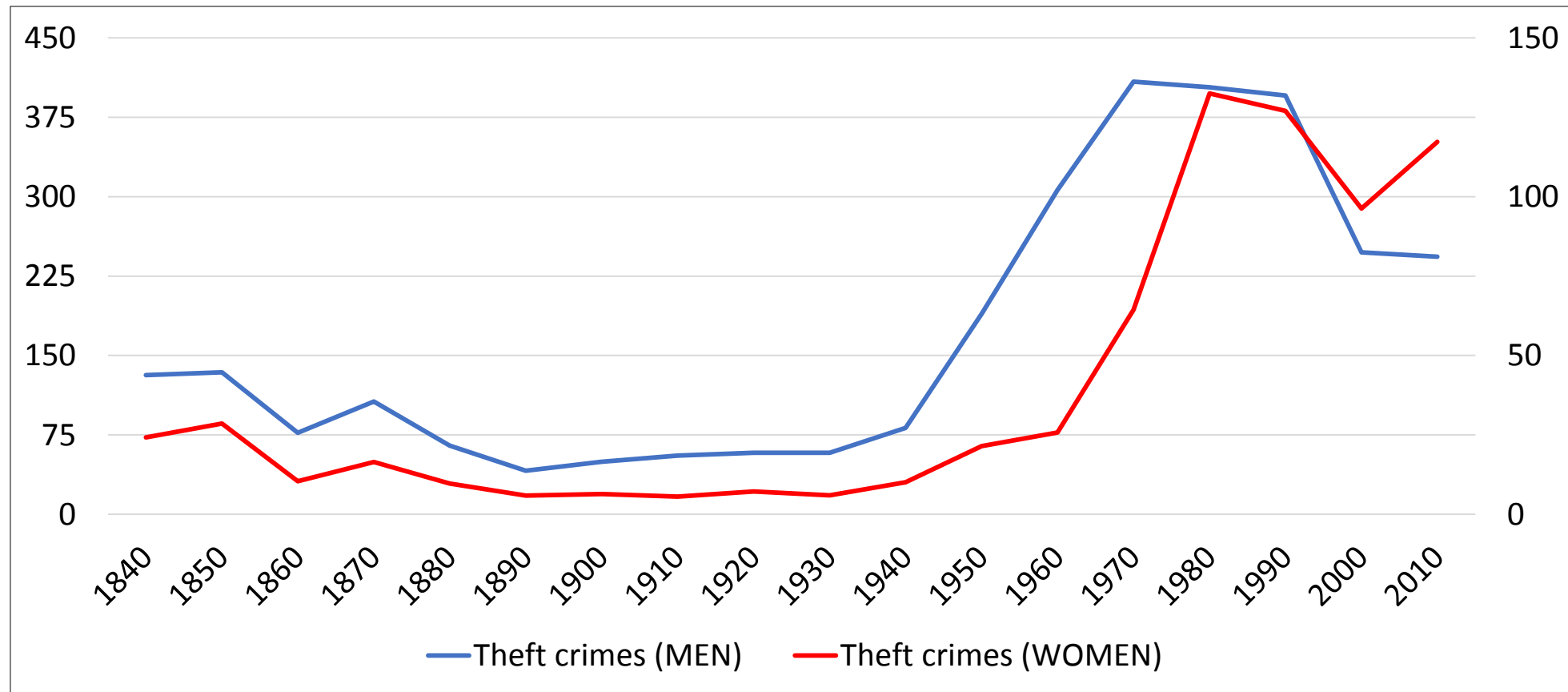
P = POLISSTATISTIK

DÅ = DOMSTOLS- OCH ÅKLAGARSTATISTIK

V = STATISTIK ÖVER VERKSTÄLLAN AV DOM

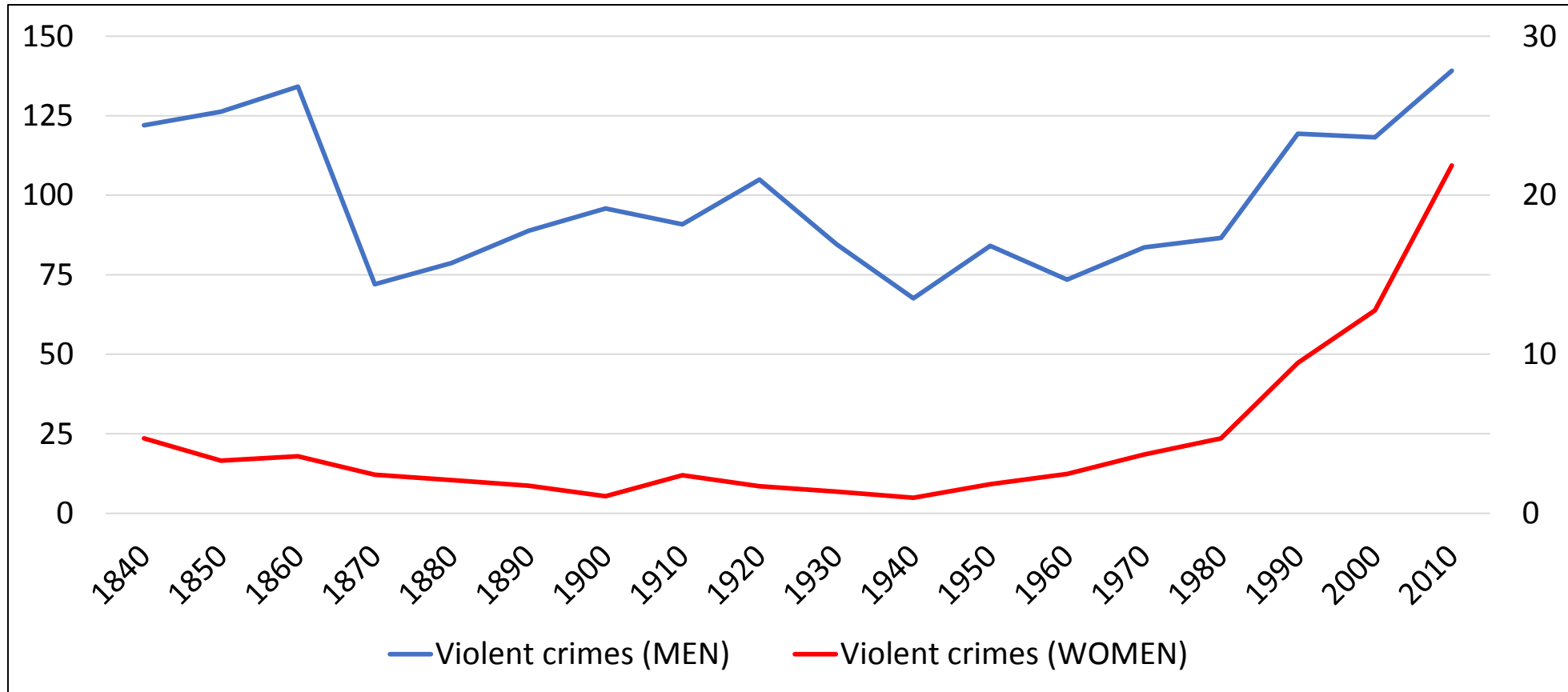
Å = STATISTIK ÖVER ÅTERFALL I BROTT

Theft crimes (convictions / 100k)



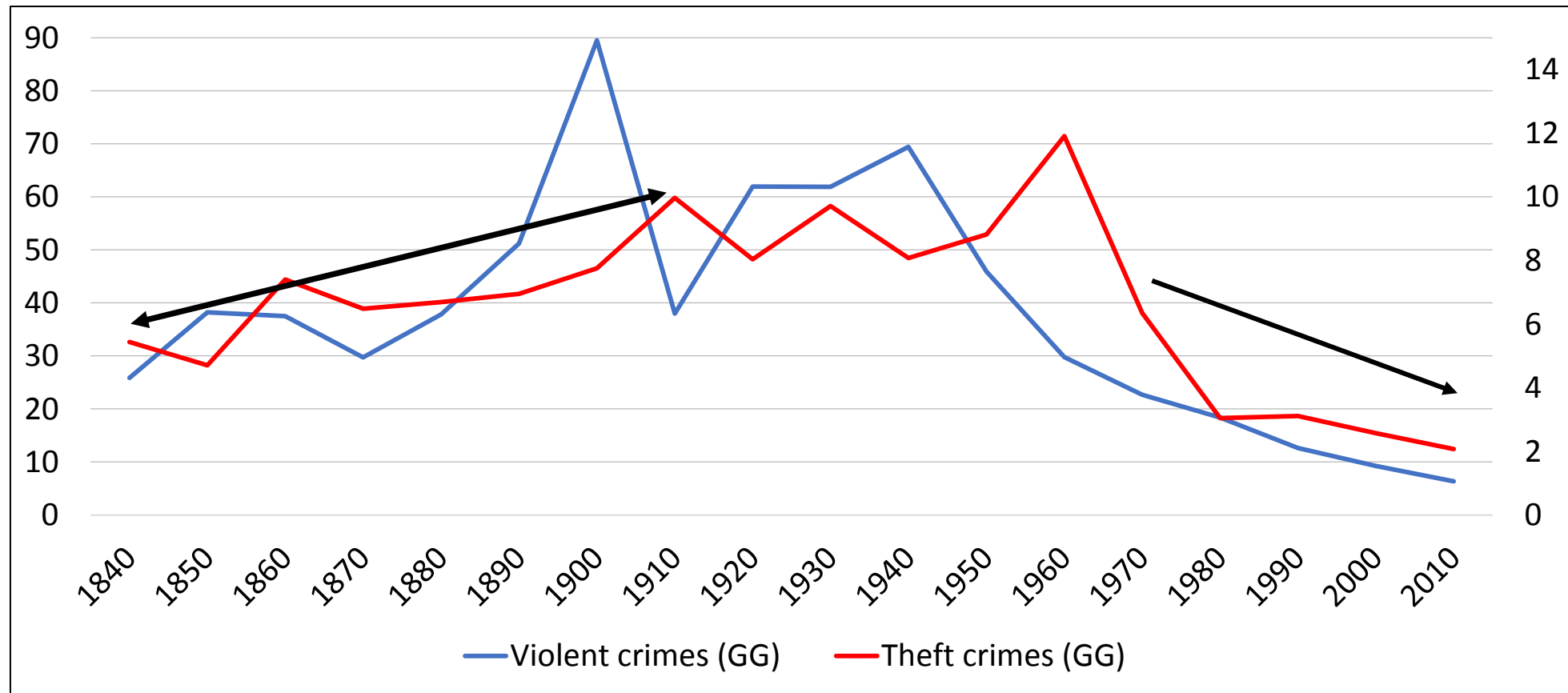
Number of convictions for theft crimes per 100,000 of population. Men and women (right y-axis), 1840-2010.

Violent crimes (convictions / 100k)



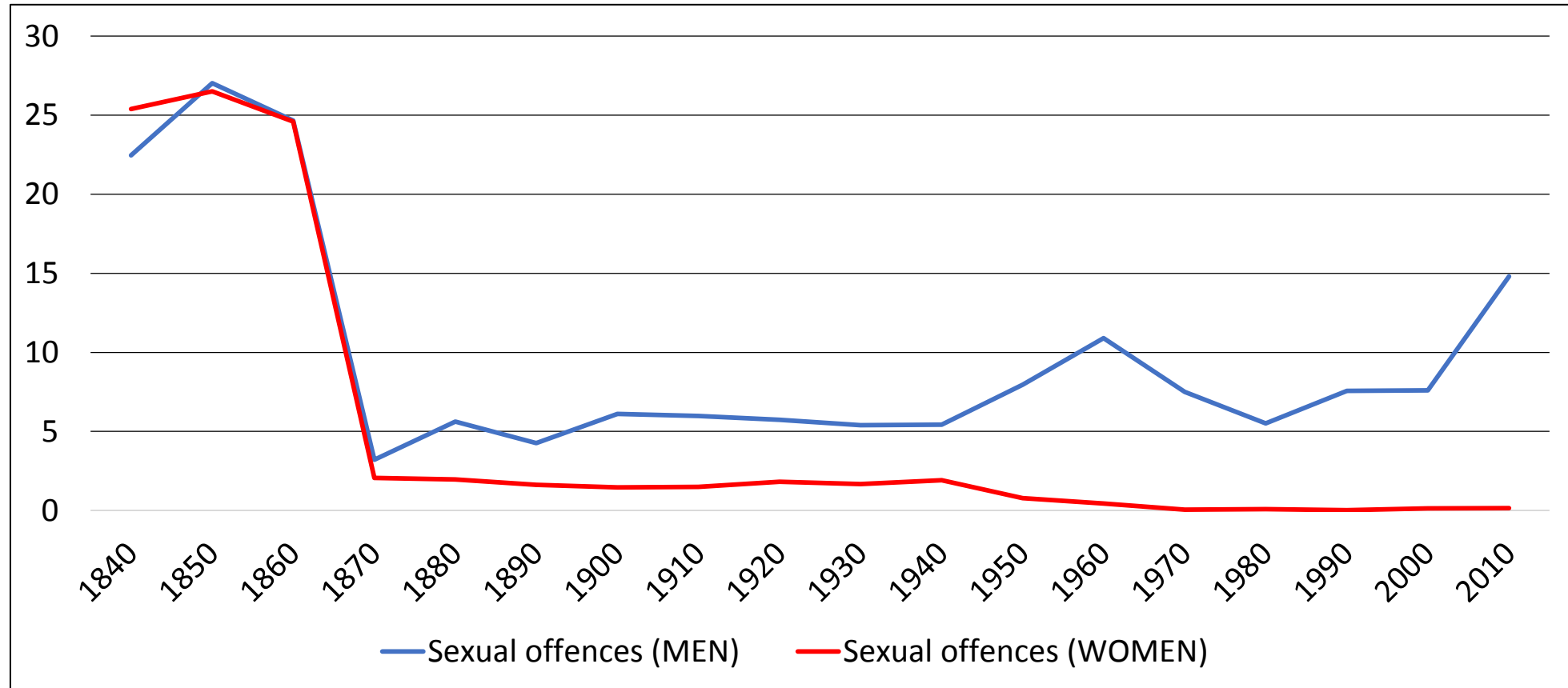
Number of convictions for violent crimes per 100,000 of population. Men and women (right y-axis), 1840-2010.

Gender gap: Theft & violent crimes



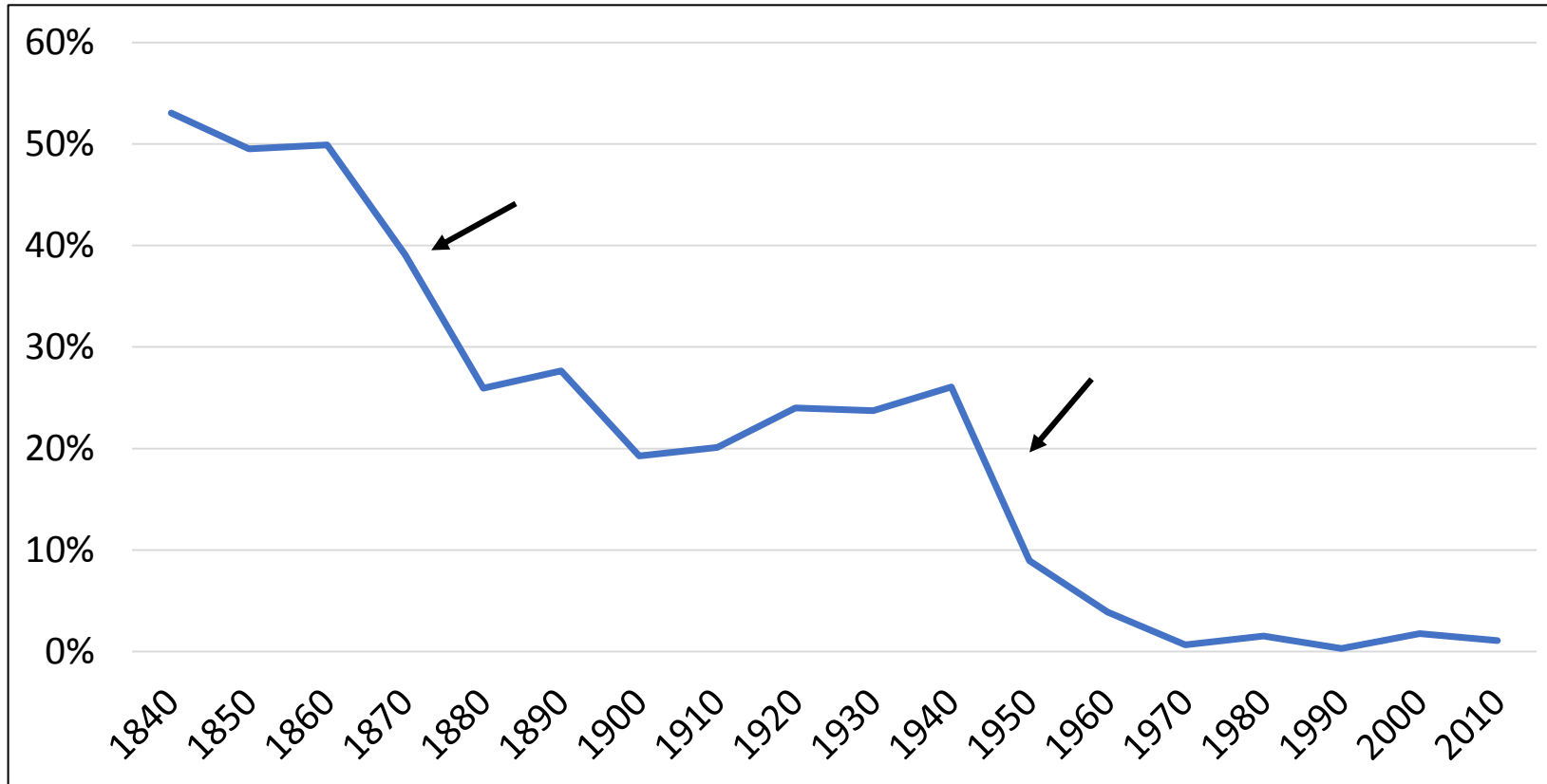
Gender gap (men/women) for theft (right, y-axis) and violent crimes, every tenth year 1840-2010.

Sexual offences (convictions / 100k)



Number of convictions for sexual offences per 100,000 of population. Men and women 1840-2010.

Sexual offences (percentage of women)



Womens share of convictions for sexual offences, every tenth year 1840-2010

Some findings

- The gender gap was highest during the 1900-1950
- Convictions for sexual offences are equal for men/women 1840-1860. Since 1950, men dominate among the convicted for these crimes.
- The gender gap is closing since 1960 with regards to theft and violent crimes. However, there is little evidence to support the emancipation hypothesis using a longer time frame.

However ...

- The gender gap ratio (men/women) is sensitive to the level of convictions among men.
- Women's lower levels of crime (especially violence), means that the gender gap ratio may show what appear to be dramatic trends.
- And while increases are large in relative terms among women, the changes among men are greater in absolute terms.
- The closing gender gap need not be a result of changes in behavior – changes in (1) social and formal definitions of violence and (2) societal reaction can also lead to increases/decreases in conviction data.

Thank you!

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