

Danish Burglary in a European Perspective

Denmark's burglary rate is remarkably high compared to other European countries – especially in detached homes in provincial areas. Explanations may be found in the preference for stand-alone houses and comparatively low rates of police clearance and home security usage.



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1. Introduction

Domestic burglary is defined as illegal entry in a residence with the intent to commit theft. In 2016, Denmark's rate of 7.8 domestic burglaries per 1,000 residents was the highest in Europe – 275% higher than the 30-country European mean of 2.1. This was no anomaly. According to Eurostat (2018), Denmark has been the European frontrunner in police-reported domestic burglary in every year since at least 2009. Denmark's burglary problem is independently documented by the International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) which ranked Denmark first in domestic burglary among 12 European countries in 2010 (van Dijk, 2013).

The current article reviews findings from a recent report by the authors (Kruize & Sorensen, 2017) that compares rates and patterns of domestic burglary in Denmark to those in Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, and England & Wales. The original report was solicited and funded by the Danish Crime Prevention Council (*Det Kriminalpræventive Råd*). Its aim was to explain Denmark's high rate of burglary and identify possibilities for reduction.

2. Domestic burglary in Denmark

Danish police use the category “domestic burglary” (*indbrud i beboelse*) to record break-ins in four types of residential properties: houses, apartments, farmhouses, and rooms. There were

29,147 burglaries recorded in 2017 (including attempts). The vast majority of these burglaries (82%) occurred in houses (*villaer; parcelhuse*) while 13% took place in apartments (*etageboliger*), 4% in farmhouses (*landejendomme*), and a tiny fraction (0.2%) in rooms (*værelser*), i.e., student dormitories and residential institutions. In 2015, 14% of all domestic burglaries were attempts (Statistics Denmark).

Rates are more useful than absolute numbers when comparing the risk of crime across geographic areas. In 2017, Denmark experienced 5.1 domestic burglaries per 1,000 residents.¹ This rate differed significantly across Denmark's 98 municipalities (*kommuner*), ranging from a high of 12.9 in the municipality of Gentofte to a low of zero on the island municipalities of Christiansø, Fanø, Samsø, and Læsø (Statistics Denmark). In recent years, domestic burglary has been heavily concentrated on Zealand – especially north of, and west of, but not in, the Danish capital of Copenhagen. For example, in 2017, 8 of the 10 municipalities with the highest domestic burglary rates were in the Capital Region. Copenhagen itself, however, was well below the national average (2.8 compared to 5.1 per 1,000 residents). In fact, all but one (Aarhus) of Denmark's seven most populous municipalities had burglary rates at or below the national average. The concentration of burglary in suburban areas as opposed to major cities is a finding we return to later in this article.

NOTE 1 The rates cited here and throughout the rest of the article are based on the Danish definition of domestic burglary (*indbrud i beboelse*). Unlike the Eurostat rate referred to in Section 1, the Danish-defined rate excludes burglaries in detached sheds, garages, and cellars, as well as those in summer houses, allotment gardens, camping trailers and houseboats. The Eurostat definition includes these because it is impossible to disaggregate them in all of the countries they examine.

According to a national victim survey conducted by the Ministry of Justice, 78% of all domestic burglaries in 2016 were reported to police. This included 87% of completed burglaries and 50% of attempts (Boesen Pedersen et al., 2017: 33). Clearance rates for burglary are low. Among domestic burglaries reported to police in 2017, only a tiny handful (5.4%) resulted in charges against one or more suspects (Statistics Denmark).

Interviews with a sample of 20 Danish burglars (NIRAS, 2014) provide an insight into their motives and methods. Burglars report that stand-alone houses are their preferred targets as the risk of being observed is lower than at apartments and row houses where neighbors are in closer proximity. Houses are targeted on the basis of accessibility, likely payoff, and absence of residents. Preference is given to houses concealed by trees, bushes and fences all of which provide relaxed working conditions for breaking and entering (NIRAS, 2014: 38-39).

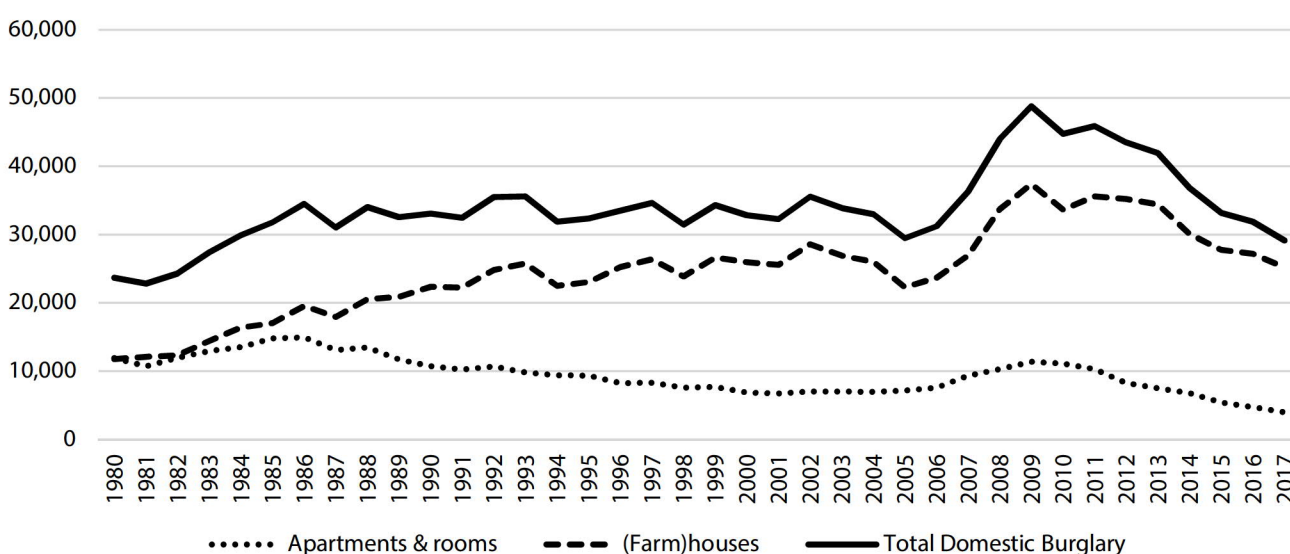
Burglary levels were relatively stable from 1985 to 2007 when there were 30,000 to 35,000 break-ins (including attempts) reported each year. This number increased dramatically during the period 2008-2013 reaching a peak of 48,670 in 2009, but has since returned to earlier levels. Figure 1 shows an uptrend for houses (including farmhouses) and a downtrend for apartments (including rooms) throughout much of the period 1980-2017. The larger volume of break-ins at houses as compared to apartments is partly due to Denmark having more houses than apartments in its housing stock and partly to an inherently greater risk for houses as compared to apartments.²

Various theories have been suggested to explain the short-term rise in the late 2000s (Sorensen 2011; Balvig 2017), but none are definitively accepted. On March 24, 2010, the Ministry of Justice presented its so-called “Burglary Package” (*Indbrudspakken*) which introduced a set of anti-burglary strategies centered on four primary initiatives: 1) increased home security; 2) targeted police efforts; 3) increased attention to known repeat offenders; and 4) a crackdown on the stolen goods market. While it is difficult to estimate the extent to which the government’s efforts can be credited, the number of reported domestic burglaries dropped in every year during the period 2009-2017. Initial data for 2018 show a continued drop in the first quarter, but a slight rise in the second – as compared to the first and second quarters of 2017. Whether the overall downward trend continues is anyone’s guess. TrygFonden, Realdania, Bolius and The Danish Crime Prevention Council recently announced the ambitious goal of slashing Denmark’s current number of burglaries by two-thirds (down to 10,000 per year). As of now, however, Denmark’s rate of domestic burglary remains one of the highest in Europe.

3. The Danish burglary rate compared to other European countries

The concept *domestic burglary* contains two elements: burglary and residence. Like Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands and England & Wales, Denmark has a separate penal category that distinguishes theft from residences from domestic burglary. The decisive difference between theft and burglary tends to hinge on whether an offender has been invited into the premises. If the offender has not been invited in, the case will

Figure 1. Number of domestic burglaries reported to police, by type of residence, 1980-2017



NOTE 2 In 2017, 40% of Denmark’s 2,592,290 private residences were apartments, while 45% were stand-alone houses and 15% were row houses or duplexes (*række-, kæde-, dobbelthuse*) (Statistics Denmark, StatBank Table BOL104).

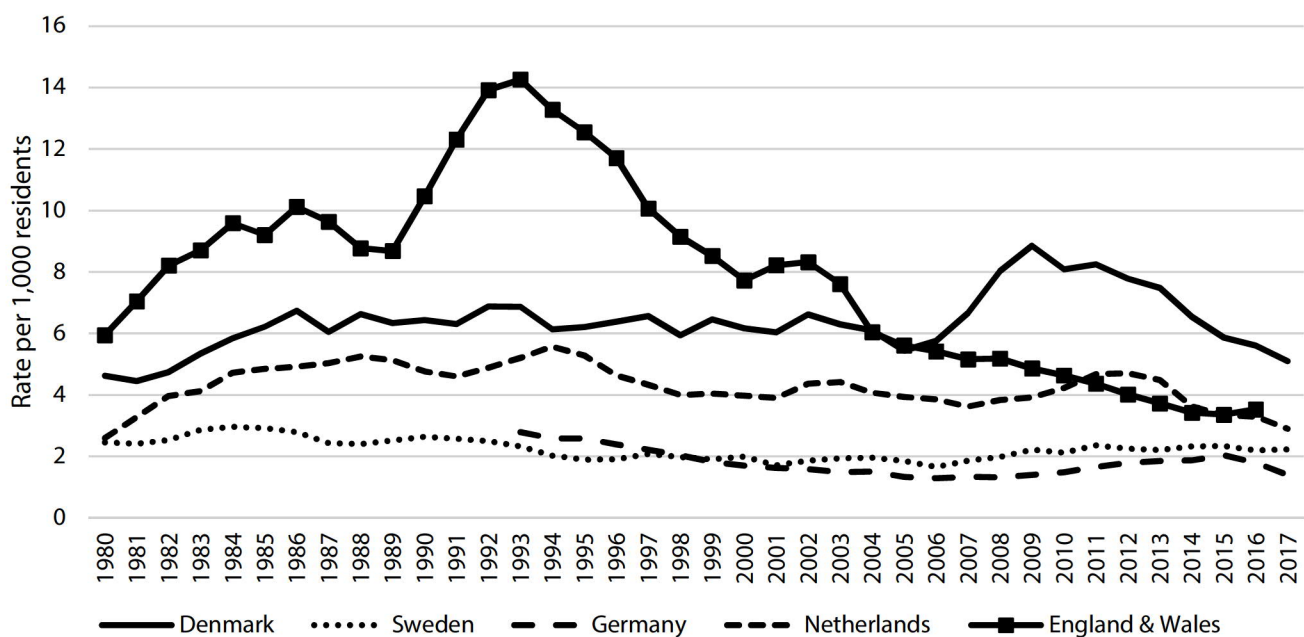
generally be registered as burglary. In Denmark and Germany, however, the crime is registered as theft even if an offender enters uninvited through an open window or unlocked door. Burglaries are categorized as *attempts* if the offender has tried to break in without success. On the other hand, if the offender succeeds in forcing his or her way into the property, the crime will be counted as a completed burglary regardless of whether anything is taken. In all five countries, a “residence” is limited to the residential interior of the home plus any rooms/structures that have a door directly connected to the residential interior. There are minor differences across some countries in how residences are defined. In Denmark, Germany and Sweden, residences are limited to primary addresses and do not include holiday homes. In the Netherlands and England & Wales, holiday homes fall within the definition of a residence. Analyses indicate that the minor differences in definitions mentioned above cannot explain Denmark’s high European ranking on residential burglary. This said, differences in the way thefts and burglaries are defined and registered may explain a significant proportion of the difference between Danish and Swedish rates (as discussed in Section 5).

Throughout the period 1980 to 2017, Denmark’s burglary rate was consistently higher than rates in Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands. Meanwhile, rates in England & Wales³ were significantly higher than those found in Denmark until 2004, after which they fell below Danish levels (see Figure 2). An indexing of trends since 2000 shows that four out of five coun-

tries – with England & Wales as the exception – experienced a rise in residential burglary during the second half of the 2000s. This rise began in 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009 for Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany, respectively. The most dramatic increase occurred in Denmark – a fact that may be attributable to organizational turbulence in law enforcement following the Police Reform of 2007. The Reform involved a major restructuring of the National Police. Many police officers described it as disorienting and it was arguably responsible for a concomitant decline in clearance rates (see Sorensen, 2011: 42-44). The Danish rate of domestic burglary peaked in 2009 – but has fallen consistently since 2011. The Dutch and German curves only began to fall in 2013 and 2016, while the Swedish numbers were still rising as of 2017 (see Figure 3).

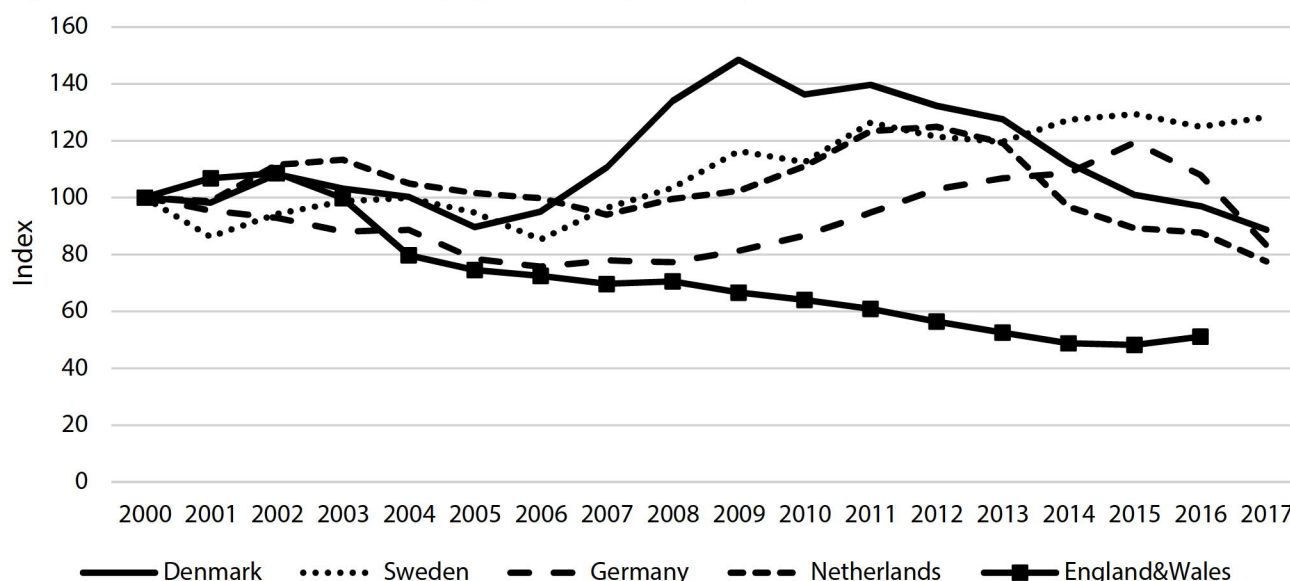
The rise of burglary in these four countries may have been caused, at least in part, by the expansion of the Schengen Area to nine Eastern European countries in 2007 and the acceptance of Romania and Bulgaria into the EU that same year. Police in Denmark, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands all refer to a growth in the number of mobile organized criminal groups, often described as Eastern European, and believe that these groups are responsible for a growing proportion of all residential burglaries. This assumption is reinforced by the fact that England & Wales – which is not party to the Schengen Agreement – did not experience an increase in burglary in the second half of the 2000s. Organized criminal groups appear to prefer areas outside the big cities. The displacement of burglary

Figure 2. Domestic burglary rates per 1,000 residents, 1980-2017



NOTE 3 The English Home Office changed the counting rules for domestic burglary in 2017. The category is now labeled “residential burglary” and counts are not comparable to previous years.

Figure 3. Indexed trends in domestic burglary, 2000--2017 (2000 = 100)

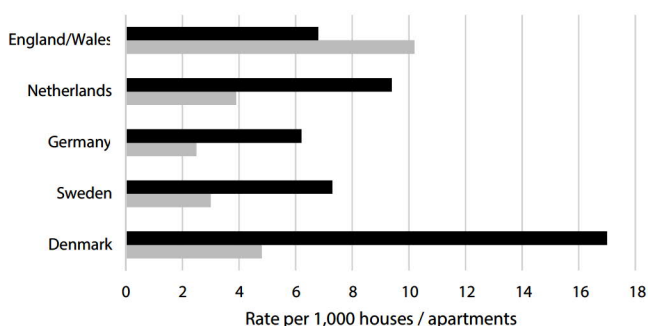


from Danish cities to the provinces⁴ supports the notion of increasing activity on the part of organized burglary rings.

4. The impact of region and type of dwelling

There are significant regional differences within the five countries. These differences reveal important clues regarding to Denmark’s burglary problem. When considering urban areas alone, Denmark’s rate of domestic burglary is not much higher than that found in the other four countries. The difference lies in the provinces, where Denmark is clearly more attractive to residential burglars.

Figure 4. Domestic burglary rates per 1,000 houses and apartments, 2015



Similarly, the analysis shows that Denmark’s burglary rate for apartments differs far less from the other countries than its burglary rate for houses. Furthermore, rates in the Copenhagen Metropolitan Area (*Byen København*) do not differ significantly from those found in the metropolitan areas of the other countries. These results presumably go hand in hand: There is an overrepresentation of apartments in big cities. The high rate of burglary in Denmark can be attributed to burglary in houses in provincial areas outside of big cities.

5. Additional explanations

Additional explanations for Denmark’s high rate of burglary are sought by means of pairwise comparisons of Denmark with the other countries one by one.

Denmark and Sweden

According to official guidelines, residential burglaries should be recorded similarly in Sweden and Denmark. The statistics, however, suggest otherwise. In 2015 official data recorded 154% more domestic burglaries in Denmark than Sweden, but only 24% more (non-distraction) residential thefts and 72% fewer residential distraction thefts (*tricktyverier*). Since it seems unlikely that Swedish and Danish burglars would use vastly different tactics, it makes more sense to attribute these differences to registration practices. When all forms of burglary and theft are combined, Denmark’s overrepresentation drops from 154% to 51%.

NOTE 4 The proportion of burglaries committed in a major city – Copenhagen, Frederiksberg, Aarhus, Odense or Aalborg – fell from 30% in 2007 to 19% in 2017.

Our analysis also indicates that the Danish dwelling stock has a larger proportion of (stand-alone and row) houses than Sweden (59% vs 44%) which, all else equal, should be expected to raise Denmark's rate of residential burglary.

Denmark and Germany

The city states Hamburg and Bremen as well as the federal states North Rhine-Westphalia and Schleswig-Holstein are significantly closer to Denmark in terms of burglary rates than the other German states, while the southern state of Bayern has the lowest rate in Germany. Much of the difference in burglary rates across German states can be predicted on the basis of levels of detection (clearance): the higher the detection rate, the lower the burglary rate. The German detection rates are significantly higher than those found in Denmark (both in general and for residential burglary specifically), and may be an important factor in explaining Germany's much lower level of residential burglary.

Denmark and the Netherlands

In Denmark, reference is often made to the Dutch certification program (which requires a specified level of security in newly constructed dwellings) as an explanation for the Netherlands' lower burglary levels. The current analysis rejects this explanation because target hardening under certification has not been applied to a big enough proportion of the housing stock to account for differences in Danish-Dutch burglary levels. Furthermore, there is relatively little difference in apartment-specific burglary rates between the two countries. There is a substantial difference in rates for houses and we suggest two possible explanations for this difference: The first concerns type of building. In the Netherlands, 75% of all houses are row houses, while 75% of the houses in Denmark are detached, stand-alone houses. Our thesis is that the burglary risk for detached houses is considerably higher than it is for row houses, as detached houses are more isolated and can be broken into from all four sides (row houses can only be broken into from the front and back unless they are on the end of the row). Our second explanation for the lower burglary rate in the Netherlands draws on differences in employment patterns. While female attachment to the labor force is high in both countries, a significantly higher proportion of women are only part-time employed in the Netherlands as compared to Denmark (75% vs. 40%) This means that Dutch houses are more likely to be occupied throughout the day.

Denmark and England & Wales

The residential burglary rate in England & Wales was significantly higher than Denmark's in the 1990s. It was not until the middle of the 2000s that the English/Welsh rate fell below the Danish rate. The question is therefore not why the Danish rate is higher than that in England & Wales, but how the latter succeeded in reducing their rates so drastically. British

criminologists routinely answer this question by pointing to concomitant increases in home security and situational crime prevention (Tseloni et al., 2017: 10-12). The introduction of Secured by Design (SBD) target hardening standards for doors and windows in the UK has, for example, been deemed an important contributor to burglary reduction (Armitage & Monchuk, 2011).

6. Implications

There is no evidence that better insurance coverage causes Danes to secure their homes less diligently than residents of other countries. Nor is there evidence that Denmark's wealth as a society implies more valuable household goods and thus invites more burglary. Nor can the explanation be found in the demographic mix or in the Danish lifestyle as compared to other countries. Our comparative analysis of the Danish burglary rate demonstrates that it is particularly when it comes to houses that Denmark stands in a bad light. This is probably because a large proportion of Danish homes are detached, stand-alone structures which tend to have a greater risk of burglary than semi-detached houses, row houses, and apartments. Since Denmark cannot easily change its stock of dwellings, other methods of prevention must be sought.

In 2017 Trygffonden and the Danish Crime Prevention Council published *Hvad virker? (What Works?)* examining burglary prevention in the private home (COWI, 2017). The publication was based on knowledge collected by researchers from Denmark and from the Cambridge Centre for Evidence-Based Policing (Sherman et al., 2017). This collective effort considers the prevention of domestic burglary from five perspectives: that of individual residents; neighborhood groups; local authorities; national authorities; and the market for stolen goods. We reflect on the results of our international comparison using knowledge produced by this *What Works* study.

Isolated houses

Danish burglary trends indicate that houses have been increasingly targeted while the risk for burglary in apartments has fallen (see Figure 1). The burglary rate of Danish apartments is, in fact, not much higher than that found for apartments elsewhere in Europe. Burglary prevention in Denmark should therefore focus on stand-alone houses – which are relatively isolated compared to houses in other European countries (Eurostat, 2018).⁵

The *What Works* study (COWI, 2017: 39; 43) suggests that individual households can reduce their risk of burglary through the use of mock occupancy indicators, i.e., tricks to suggest that residents are home. The study also suggests that various forms of target hardening that increase the time required for illegal entry may reduce risk (Ibid.: 36-37). It is, however, reasonable to wonder whether target hardening would have as

NOTE 5 A higher proportion of Denmark's population lives in detached houses in rural areas than is the case in most EU countries – including Sweden (2016 data: EU28 average=17.5%; SE=20.8%; DK=26.1%) (Eurostat, 2018).

strong an effect on detached houses lacking immediate neighbors as it does on homes in more densely populated areas. While solid experimental evidence is still lacking (Sherman et al., 2017), we assume that remotely-monitored video surveillance systems might be beneficial for isolated detached homes. This is because they create a state of virtual occupancy which, when used correctly, can simulate the benefits of physical occupancy by sensing intrusions and automatically reporting them to security personnel while crimes are in progress. In this way, they may act both as a deterrent and as a means of apprehending burglars in the act.

Target hardening

The more difficult it is to enter a dwelling, the less likely it is that a burglary will take place. This simple logic is embraced by many of the findings cited in the *What Works* studies. According to Sherman et al. (2017: 6), multiple barriers may have a multiplicative effect, i.e., providing more protection than the sum of their parts. The same report points specifically to the protective effects of the following combination of barriers: window locks; deadbolt door locks; use of a chain inside the door; and lights on a timer both indoors and outdoors. British criminologists generally attribute the remarkable drop in domestic burglaries in England & Wales in the 1990s to increased residential target hardening (e.g., Tseloni et al. 2017: 10-12). Meanwhile, the most recent comparative study of the use of burglary security measures in Europe ranked Denmark 17th out of 18 countries in terms of the proportion of households that report using “special locks” and burglar alarms, respectively (van Dijk et al., 2007: 85).

The Netherlands also views target hardening as a successful means for the prevention of burglary. Since 1999 Dutch authorities have required that all new homes be PKVW certified, i.e., built with “burglary proof” locks, doors and windows. This policy seems to be slowly paying off as the proportion of hardened residences in the building stock increases.

In Denmark several actors advocate for introducing a similar arrangement. While this could have an effect in the long run, it seems unlikely that it would substantially reduce Denmark's number of burglaries in the period of just a few years – as desired by Bo Trygt! (Bolius, 2018). Furthermore, Denmark should carefully weigh the potential burglary-reducing benefits of target hardening against the psychological and economic costs of expanding the culture of fortification.

Arresting burglars

The Federal Republic of Germany consists of 16 states whose burglary rates differ substantially from one another. Experts in Germany (interviewed in our comparative study) point to inter-state differences in policing styles and we identified a strong negative correlation between burglary rates and clearance rates for burglary in the 16 German states. If we add Danish provinces (*landsdele*; Bornholm excluded) to the German states, evidence for the strong negative correlation is further strengthened ($r=-0.83$; $p<0.01$; $n=26$). Data from the Netherlands also indicate a strong negative correlation between burglary and clearance rates ($r= - 0.77$; $p < 0.01$; $n=12$).

A higher arrest rate for burglary may act as a deterrent – especially in the case of relatively organized, mobile burglars. High arrest rates may also have an incapacitation effect as a significant proportion of burglars are likely to commit new burglaries if not stopped by an arrest and period of confinement. The correlation between burglary and clearance rates may therefore reflect a deterrence effect, an incapacitation effect, or a combination of the two. There is, however, also the possibility that causality runs the opposite direction, i.e., that high burglary rates overtax the resources of local police and thereby cause lower clearance rates.

It is likely that increases in clearance rates could help to further reduce the rate of burglary in Denmark. The means to achieve this are, however, still unspecified in the Danish context. The path forward will require an in-depth analysis of present patrol routines, intelligence analysis, investigation tactics, and the effort and commitment put into all three.

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