

## #09 (CHARIS KUBRIN)

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### Jerry Ratcliffe:

Hi, I'm Jerry Ratcliffe with Reducing Crime, a podcast featuring influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

Charis Kubrin is a professor at the University of California, Irvine. Her recent research on California Proposition 47, a law that reduces some non-violent, non-serious crimes to misdemeanors, has attracted quite a bit of attention. Find out more in this podcast at [reducingcrime.com](http://reducingcrime.com) and on Twitter @\_ReducingCrime.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

Charis Kubrin is professor of criminology, law, and society at the University of California, Irvine. Her research focuses on neighborhood correlates of crime, with an emphasis on race and violent crime. She also explores the impact of various criminal justice policies on crime rates. She's published extensively and is co-author of two books, *Researching Theories of Crime and Deviance* and *Privileged Places: Race, Residents and the Structure of Opportunity*. She's received numerous awards. Most recently, the W.E.B. Du Bois Award from the Western Society of Criminology for significant contributions to racial and ethnic issues in the field of criminology.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

In this podcast, we talk about her recent research on California Proposition 47. Prop 47 reduces some minor crimes to misdemeanors and has resulted in significant incarceration savings, but also attracted quite a bit of a political response to her research. The full text of her research is at the episode nine entry at [reducingcrime.com/podcast](http://reducingcrime.com/podcast). There, you can also find a link to the full radio interview mentioned in the pod.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

You've talked about some of these studies a lot anyway, recently. I mean you know ...

### Charis Kubrin:

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Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. No, I'm going to answer what questions you ask me, but in case there's a technical question I want my notes here.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Because nothing loses people than a pile of statistics, the drive to work is ...

**Charis Kubrin:**

I won't talk about in sample placebo tests, I promise.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But that sounded painful, like it was some kind of medical thing. In sample placebo test?

**Charis Kubrin:**

Yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I had that once. It cleared up a penicillin.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Charis, what is it with these studies that you do? Do you attract controversy or do you deliberately go out and caught it or does it just hunt you down and find you?

**Charis Kubrin:**

I want it on the record that I've been researching controversial topics before they became controversial.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You make them controversial.

**Charis Kubrin:**

No, I have nothing to do with it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Oh come on, this is absolutely down to you.

**Charis Kubrin:**

No, it has absolutely nothing to do with me. It just turns out that the couple areas that I'm doing research in, including criminal justice reform, happens to be highly politicized, highly controversial, especially following a certain somebody coming into the presidency, but he shall remain unnamed.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The Dark Lord.

**Charis Kubrin:**

We will not say his name in this interview.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So I was really interested in Prop 47 and the research you did around Prop 47. Given the fact that I actually have listeners from outside of California, outside the United States, as simple as possible, help us understand what is Prop 47 and why do we care about it?

**Charis Kubrin:**

Yeah, I mean, it's actually a pretty big deal in California. Although outside of California, most people don't know about it. It's one reform in a series of reforms that California's been enacting, mainly to reduce its prison population. So in 2011, we had a major problem with individuals in our state prisons. Over-packed, super crowded. Supreme Court stepped in and said, "This can't be anymore. All kinds of violations of constitutional rights. You have to reduce the state prison populations." And we started down a path of reform. Prop 47 is one of those reforms, and what it does is it identifies very low level, nonviolent, non-serious offenders who have committed certain crimes, mainly drug crimes, but also small thefts and other things.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Okay. So if it was drug crimes, but they also had a handgun with them or there was any hint of violence, none of those guys were included.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Right, no. So we're talking about pretty low level stuff. And basically charges these individuals with misdemeanors rather than felonies. The idea being that they'll serve their time in jail and not be up in state prisons at the tune of \$75,000 a year. All of that savings from not incarcerating folks in state prisons, as part of Prop 47 is targeted towards prevention efforts in the state.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Okay. So they weren't necessarily released, they were just pushed back to the County and said, "You deal with them as you see fit for the remainder of the sentence?"

**Charis Kubrin:**

Well, that was actually a prior reform called realignment. So the first stage of reform was realignment, which is realigning non-serious offenders, taking them out of state prisons, putting them locally in the County and saying, "Here's money, deal with them," either through community supervision or jails.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

As they see fit, yeah.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Prop 47 is actually a reclassification criminal justice reform, whereby individuals who have committed very low level crimes, rather than being charged with felonies, are being charged as misdemeanants.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Okay. So, I've listened to other interviews that you've done, and I'm starting to get some sense of this. Collectively, a bunch of people who are probably vested in the outcome and some who are not, just seem to have collectively lost their shit over this research then.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Well there's been a lot of reforms. Prop 47 is one of them. And I think for many people, the concern is, well what is this doing to crime? We're releasing all these offenders, many of them are just going on community supervision. We are not taking seriously these drug offenders. The assumption is that crime is going to skyrocket, and that's a fair question. I mean, it's important to ask that question-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And the pressure will, to some degree then, be put on what are the police doing about it? What are the prosecutors doing about it?

**Charis Kubrin:**

Totally. And right, and what has happened to crime in the state, in the aftermath of these criminal justice reforms?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So you did some research to have a look at that question?

**Charis Kubrin:**

Yeah. I don't really have a dog in the race on Prop 47 or realignment or any of these other reforms. I mean, in general, I think if we can keep crime down and do the least harm and save the state money, great, but I wasn't necessarily convinced about the answer of what the impact of these reforms would be on crime, but we didn't know.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And we can't lock up everybody for absolutely everything for the whole remainder of their life, so we have to find some [crosstalk 00:06:01] measuring this, right?

**Charis Kubrin:**

Right. Well that's how we got to where we were in 2011 with the Supreme Court stepping in. "The good old days," that some people will harken about. I often talk with folks and they go, "Oh, in the good old days, we actually made sure criminals were accountable for their crimes." And I said, "Well, the good old days led us to the Supreme Court stepping in and saying, "California's got to change.""

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And the good old days is a variable thing. Should we go back to when we ship people off to Australia? We hung people for 223 crimes and everybody died of syphilis aged 35, right?

**Charis Kubrin:**

Yes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That introduction of Prop 47 was what year?

**Charis Kubrin:**

That was 2014.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Okay. So there was enough time now to see, for a year or two afterwards, what the impact would be. Because arguably, the impact of releasing a bunch of people is that it will be instantaneous, right?

**Charis Kubrin:**

Well in this case, the assumption was that crime rates would be high because the individuals that police would normally target and actually put into prison, they're not even bothering with these individuals, because it's so useless to classify them as misdemeanors. So it's that they're not even enforcing the drug laws, that individuals are coming right back out of the system and back onto the streets and using drugs and committing all kinds of violent crimes in order to get those drugs. So the assumption is that Prop 47 would definitely cause, certainly drug crimes to go up, but especially other crimes as well, violent and property crimes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So the argument is that crime is going to go up because the police won't be doing one aspect of their job, simply because it's not tied to what they deem to be an appropriate punishment.

**Charis Kubrin:**

That's part of it. And the other part is the deterrence argument, right? Which is that if you have weak penalties for individuals engaging in these crimes, theft and drugs, that they're not going to be deterred, because there's no threat of a state sentence, a state prison sentence, looming over them.

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**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, and as we've seen by the death penalty, that's completely curtailed all homicide across the United States, right?

**Charis Kubrin:**

Of course. It's wonderful that it was able to do.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And I'm actually the same as you. I have no dog in the fight. I have no moral position, because anybody who knows me knows I'm completely amoral, but I don't have a moral position on the death penalty either. If it worked, and the application wasn't there's evidence that it's racist, I could find a way to support it. However, it doesn't. There's no evidence that it has any deterrent capacity and there all these implementation issues.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well California just halted the death penalty, right?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah.

**Charis Kubrin:**

And halted the sentences of those on death row. That's also quite controversial at the moment.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Oh, I'm sure you can do a study and attract more and more people to-

**Charis Kubrin:**

Someone else can do that study. The thing is I had been doing research on realignment's impact on crime rates, spent years working with colleagues in the department, Carroll Seron and others, assembling the best scholars doing research on prison downsizing and its impact on crime throughout the state. After years, we put out a special issue of the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science detailing the findings, which by the way, showed realignment had very, very modest impacts only on one or two property crimes, that of auto theft, mainly. And I was busy actually trying to disseminate those findings, but people were going, "Well, what about Prop 47 now?" And I said, "Well, wait a minute, you were just asking a few weeks ago about realignment. I'm giving you the results for realignment," but now they're on to Prop 47.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

See, when people find stuff interesting, it comes and finds you.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Yeah. I was busy trying to share my realignment findings with folks. They're asking about Prop 47. My response was typically, "Find someone who's studying Prop 47." After a couple of years of that, turned out nobody was studying Prop 47.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Which if you think about it, is actually incredible.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Insane.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

We bring in this massive potential change to the whole flow of the criminal justice system, and the politicians are like, "Yep, there you go. There, it's done. We've solved our problem." And then nobody's actually been required to look at it and think about what those implications are. And I don't want to speak for people who oppose Prop 47, but you can understand some of their frustrations if they really believe that this thing is hugely harmful.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Right. And I mean, a lot of police officers I've spoken with will tell me that they see the same guys over and over. They're not deterred, they're engaging in small crimes. There's nothing to stop them, there's no deterrent effect. And I'm saying, "Okay, I understand that. That's what you're experiencing. The question is what does that mean for crime statewide in a systematic analysis?"

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right. How does your individual experience translate to some kind of aggregate thing that tells us ... Because we can't drive policy by individual cases.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Oh absolutely, that's the point. But people don't necessarily want to hear the systematic data, what the study found. And being an academic "in the ivory tower" doesn't always help with the message.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Your data doesn't count when I have feelings.

**Charis Kubrin:**

I think the point we talked about earlier, which is that it's important to draw that discussion, and because I think it does contextualize ... Like hearing what police officers are experiencing on the ground, what members of communities plagued by crime are experiencing, is important-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yes, but it's a great way to define and think about the research questions.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Absolutely. And it's one piece of it, it's not everything, and the study findings are important. And this is why ... So Brad Bartos and I ... Brad Bartos is a doctoral student here at UCI, got all of the data in order to be able to examine the impact of Prop 47 on violent and property crime in the year following its enactment. So that was 2015.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And what did you find?

**Charis Kubrin:**

The quick answer is no impact, whatsoever. So basically, it had no impact on violent crime, which is not at all surprising, because these are very low level offenders to begin with.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

When you say that, did violent crime change but it just wasn't statistically significant?

**Charis Kubrin:**

Right. Of course violent crime changed, and in fact, it went up a little in 2015. Crime did, in the state of California. So of course people were assuming that those upticks in crime could be attributed to Prop 47. And I like to remind people, before I even did this study, crime is caused by a constellation of factors, right? Simply saying, "We enacted this and crime went up," does not prove that that caused crime to go up, right. We have to have a much more sophisticated methodology to do that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

We need to have a counterfactual, and listeners to this podcast will ... And a lot of them are well versed in evidence based policing. So we need to find our comparison group, and of course you haven't got a comparison group that's directly measurable, so what did you do?

**Charis Kubrin:**

Well, so we used a really cool method, synthetic control group design, that allows you to-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's a scary name though.

**Charis Kubrin:**

And it's quasi experimental, which also throws some people off. Its got all of the benefits of an experimental approach minus random assignment. So in theory, the perfect study would take all the states in the United States, randomly assign some of them to have Prop 47 and others not to, and then we see what differences there.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, we're not going there anytime soon.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Not going there anytime soon. So what this approach allows us to do is identify states that looked a lot like California prior to the implementation of Prop 47, but states that did not enact prop 47, and we compare what happened in crime in California after Prop 47, to crime in what we call counter-factual California.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And you create counterfactual California by actually merging a few states together, didn't you?

**Charis Kubrin:**

So you have what's called a donor pool. Donor pool is every state that could be part of that analysis to compare California to. In our case, you wouldn't want a state that enacted a Prop 47-like policy, because that taints it. So what we did ... And luckily there was none. So every other state in the United States could potentially be in our donor pool. What we did is we took 44 years of crime data prior to Prop 47 being implemented and found which States mirrored California on a series of crimes that most closely matched.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So what did you find?

**Charis Kubrin:**

We found that Prop 47 had no causal impact on violent crime whatsoever, and may have had a small causal impact on motor vehicle theft and larceny. But when we did some robustness checks of that finding, in other words, we subjected that finding to further scrutiny, those effects kind of went away, meaning we couldn't have strong confidence that Prop 47 causally impacted larceny and motor vehicle theft.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Okay, so there was some statistical speak in there, which means we've lost about 20% of the readers, 10 of whom are driving to work now and just had a road traffic accident. But the bottom line, if I can try-

**Charis Kubrin:**

Sorry, send me the bill.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But what that really means is that we're on the verge of potentially a finding ... And this is why people hate academia, but this is the reality of working in a messy world with a lot of uncertainty, is that there isn't a lot of confidence to try and to say this absolutely caused problems.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Right. So you have a finding, you want to subject that finding to a lot of scrutiny, right? So run them all this way-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

As important policy should come under a lot of scrutiny.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Right. And we call that robustness checks. Like how robust is this finding? If we were to change the model specification just a little bit, would we lose that finding? That's not a robust finding. We really want to bank on robust findings. So it turns out, initially we found this effect of Prop 47 on larceny and motor vehicle theft, but once we subjected it to further testing, it kind of went away, meaning it wasn't a robust finding.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right. The researchers who are listening to this will be nodding to that because they recognize that there are actually many different statistical approaches to get to an answer. I think it confuses a lot of students when they think, "Well what is the one technique I must use to get this answer?"

**Charis Kubrin:**

Exactly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And there are lots of different techniques that have their own benefits and their own negatives. And what you did then, was look at this with a range of different techniques to see, "Look, if this result is solid, it's going to hold up across a bunch of different ways of looking at it," and you didn't find it.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Right. So just to give you one concrete example of a way that we tested that was we pretended that California wasn't the state that enacted Prop 47. We randomly chose other states, pretended that they had enacted Prop 47, and then examined the impact of this fictitious Prop 47 on crime in these other states. Now in theory, the findings for those other states should be well below California because they didn't enact Prop 47, right? So we were able to rank the states and look to see where California fell in that ranking. But one other quick example of that is we changed the donor pool states a little bit. So that counterfactual California looked slightly different than it did in the previous model, to see if changing or fiddling with counterfactual California impacted the finding. And it did.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What you've really done, then, is done a lot of due diligence to try and find different ways to really understand the nature of the problem.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Correct.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But then you ran into the issue that that didn't gel with people's perception on the ground. And what I think is interesting about this is if you have a range of police officers and prosecutors, you had some quite strenuous objections to the research that you did. If it doesn't gel with their personal experience ... There's nothing wrong with those personal experiences, but now that raises an interesting question, which is, look, if things aren't actually getting worse as a result of this, why do people have this negative response to Prop 47 that they feel is experienced based?

**Charis Kubrin:**

I'm actually less bothered by people who said the findings didn't resonate with them, because we did a statewide analysis, and it could be that that masks very important variation locally that police officers are experiencing, right?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Some places could be going up. It could be getting really bad.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Fair enough. And there's no doubt that that's the case. And we don't know which those are because we just looked at the state as a whole. So for a police officer or someone to say, "Didn't resonate with my experience," is less problematic.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's okay.

**Charis Kubrin:**

What I had issues with is, I guess you could call the wholesale rejection of any kind of research to study these sorts of things. So literally, the research is a nonstarter. You know nothing because you're not a police officer. You can say nothing because you sit up in an ivory tower crunching numbers that have no basis in reality. The fact that research isn't even a part of the conversation, that was where I had trouble.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And you're running into the same problem that proponents within policing of evidence-based policing have. So it's not actually just an issue that you're having in the ivory tower, people who are police officers who've worked the streets

for years, who are now trying to advocate for evidence-based policing are running into the same problem, because now they're not the right kind of police.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Exactly. I understand that analogy well, yes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You have run into an interesting ... I'm going to use that term very liberally, an interesting range of people who are vehemently opposed to the research that you've published. I saw that the deputies ... The prosecutors?

**Charis Kubrin:**

Oh, Los Angeles Association of Deputy District Attorneys.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yes. They didn't seem very enthusiastic.

**Charis Kubrin:**

No, I've been in ongoing conversation, if you want to call it that with LAADDA about the findings, they're very critical.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

LAADDA is the Los Angeles ...

**Charis Kubrin:**

Association of Deputy District Attorneys. And it's the president that I've mainly been communicating with, who issued a statement around the findings of our study, challenging the methodology, challenging a number of issues to which we responded. It's important to point out that LAADDA and other organizations are spearheading efforts to roll back criminal justice reform in California, so there's been a real effort to get it on the ballot to revoke both Prop 47, realignment, and so I'm kind of not surprised that these are the individuals most upset with the study and its findings.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

How does it feel having not just your methodology called into question, which is something I think in academia we're kind of used to, right?

**Charis Kubrin:**

Right.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But to have questions raised about the level of bias and your liberal reform minded agenda, all that kind of stuff, how does it feel having those questions raised about your research?

**Charis Kubrin:**

Well, the good news is, is I feel so confident, and this is why it's really important to make sure all your I's are dotted and your T's are crossed when you do this kind of research, that you know the findings are going to be politicized, that you know when your head hits the pillow at night, you have done the best possible study, right? With a hundred percent confidence. So I 100% believe in the findings of this study, and that's very important and very grounding for me, and the methodology. So I feel like there's no competition there. There's always limitations with studies, but the overarching findings are as solid as they can be, and I feel good about that. And in fact, the Public Policy Institute of California recently released a report with their findings about Prop 47, which were very close to ours. So, another nail in that coffin.

**Charis Kubrin:**

I have been called so many different names, going to your second point, from left wing, liberal, crazy researcher, who's pushing a platform, to we're lying and creating false data. The range has been insane and a-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Has it surprised you?

**Charis Kubrin:**

A little bit, because it reflects, to me, this treatment of academic research as just completely baseless. I mean, some of the claims that have been wedged against me involve falsifying data, doing spotty analysis. I mean, these are things that could derail a career. Now luckily, I don't have to worry about that because they're simply not true, but those kinds of claims undermine researchers' ability to really connect with the public and share the findings in a way that I think is really important to do, I see as my duty to do.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Which is rare amongst academics.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Yeah. I mean, I think we all want that. It's a lot of work to do that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

This is very relevant policy-based research. And the part that makes me laugh, and I don't want to unburnish any credentials you have with your social justice warrior crowd, but in talking outside of this, you've struck me as being very neutral in terms of how you've approached Prop 47.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Oh absolutely.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

In terms of just going where the data goes, which is where a good scientist should go, right?

**Charis Kubrin:**

My first hat is scientist, and the data are going to show what the data are going to show.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You don't seem to have a dog in the fight at all.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Like I said, at the end of the day, I want policy that's sensible, that is least harmful, that will do the job.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

There is no future for you. There is no future in this field for you. That's a pipe dream, if ever I heard one.

**Charis Kubrin:**

More important than that is my precept, which is that we should be basing policies on empirical research first and foremost, and in all areas, right? This is what the research is intended for, so it needs to be good. But at the end of the day, that's what I'm most concerned about, is that prior to some of these handful of studies on realignment and Prop 47, we were just basically guessing about what impact it was having, and we were making policy decisions around the kind of politics around these sorts of things, rather than simply saying, "Well, what do the data show on this?" And that's why the public deserves to know, with their taxpayer money, what the findings are for this study. It's not the end of the story, but it's certainly one piece of the story. And they're getting a lot of the politicization through the media, but they're not necessarily going to be looking at my article in criminology and public policy.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Which then speaks to the reason to reach out in various different ways, because you're running into groups that have vested interests, either politically vested interest, or just emotionally vested interest. And we talked about police officers or prosecutors have an experience that differs from the research. So one of the things that we should be able to tell them is that level of variance, which, it may be worse than your area, but it's going to be better in other areas of the state. And if we're going to make statewide policy, that policy has to be statewide.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Exactly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

We can't just be-

**Charis Kubrin:**

Prop 47 is statewide.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's statewide. And then you run into a couple of numb nuts on the radio. What are their names?

**Charis Kubrin:**

John and Ken.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Now, I've only listened to the 15 minute interview with you, but I mean, these two guys seem to sound like they have the IQ of a fridge magnet between them.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Careful, you're approaching John and Ken levels of discussion.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It was fascinating to hear ... I'll put up on Twitter a link to the interview, because it's kind of fascinating.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But why wait? For the discerning listener at home, here is a heavily edited couple of minutes taken from Charis' radio interview. The link to the full 15 minutes is available at [reducingcrime.com/podcast](http://reducingcrime.com/podcast).

## SEGMENT FROM AN OUTSIDE RADIO SHOW BEGINS HERE:

**Radio DJ #1:**

I found this study preposterous. I don't believe that, because what I've seen now, twice in my life here in California, is when we put felons away in the 1990s, the crime rate went down right before our eyes.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Well, I'm a little surprised by the-

**Radio DJ #1:**

And the police will tell you that, yeah, this is ever since Prop 47 passed. There's a real world, and then there is the world that you concocted with your survey.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Right, that's a common comment that I hear all the time, is that there's no reality, but let me back up and-

**Radio DJ #1:**

And maybe it's true ... Wait, wait, do you think there's truth to it?

**Charis Kubrin:**

No. Let me back up and explain.

**Radio DJ #1:**

There's no truth to the experience we're all having out in the real world.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Of course there's truth to that experience, but let me explain. First of all, property crime, while it was up in 2015, which we acknowledged in the paper, it was actually down in 2016. And so this sense that crime is off the charts, that things are horrible, that the world is coming to an end, does not match, actually, what the data say. Putting in prison low level offenders and spending \$75,000 per year to house them there, that we are now actually ...

**Radio DJ #1:**

Oh, you have an agenda there, don't you?

**Charis Kubrin:**

Managing our prison populations in a better way ...

**Radio DJ #1:**

Really? What's 60-

**Charis Kubrin:**

Let me finish. Can you let me finish what I'm saying?

**Radio DJ #1:**

Wait, wait, there's 60,000 homeless people on the street, that's how we manage the situation. Where they're out on the street.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Quit deflecting what I'm saying. I'm trying to explain what I believe based on the data, which is that now, instead of actually housing these individuals in state prison at the tune of taxpayer dollars of \$75,000 per year per individual, we

are making smarter use of our criminal justice resources in order to address the real crime problem, which I think is violent crime. And Prop 47 really is dealing with the lowest level of nonviolent drug and petty theft offenders.

**Radio DJ #1:**

You talk about deflection? Wait a second.

**Charis Kubrin:**

In many ways I'm not surprised that at the end of the day Prop 47 didn't impact property crime or violent crime, because these are really just low level offenders that don't [crosstalk 00:26:09] that we could better use to fight crime in a different way.

**Radio DJ #1:**

They're low level offenders ... Wait a second, they're low level offenders until they steal your car, and then it's not a low level offense to a person any more.

**Radio DJ #2:**

When you said property crime has gone down, did that include what we now classify as misdemeanor crime?

**Charis Kubrin:**

So, basically property crime in 2016 went down, that is for burglary, larceny, and auto theft, many of the crimes that we're talking about under Prop 47.

**Radio DJ #2:**

When prisoners are inside four walls they can't hurt anybody, they can't steal anything. You really don't understand that?

**Charis Kubrin:**

Well, that's a demeaning statement. And by the way-

**Radio DJ #2:**

Oh, wait a second. Hold on, did I trigger you?

**Charis Kubrin:**

No.

**Radio DJ #2:**

It's not a demeaning statement. Why don't you tell me if you understand what I'm saying?

**Charis Kubrin:**

But I'm not used to dealing with discussions of crime and important issues of this kind in such a demeaning, dismissive way.

**Radio DJ #2:**

Oh, demeaning and dismissive. It looks like we have a snowflake here, don't we now? And most law enforcement that we speak with on the air have said absolutely, it started immediately after Prop 47. So you're in your laboratory, we're out here in the real world, and you're asking us not to trust our eyes, and our ears, and our experiences.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Well, I would like for your listeners to reach out if they want to see a copy of the study, I'm happy to share it. If they want to talk about the study, I'm happy to share it. I'm happy to talk to anybody about the findings of the study. At the end of the day, we voted for Prop 47. At the end of the day ...

**Radio DJ #2:**

Well, they voted for it under false pretenses.

**Charis Kubrin:**

We voted for Prop 47 to be implemented by a wide margin, and basically, American voters deserve to learn what the data say, not what two individuals have to say on a talk show.

**Radio DJ #2:**

Clearly, you're not an unbiased researcher. You're an advocate with a political agenda. It is not shocking that you came to your conclusion. After hearing you talk for 50 minutes, it's clear you went in looking for this result and you got it because it's what you believe in.

**Charis Kubrin:**

There is absolutely no response to that because it's so outlandish and ridiculous, there's nothing for me to say in response to that.

**Radio DJ #2:**

Fine, then we're done, thanks for coming on.

**- SEGMENT FROM AN OUTSIDE RADIO SHOW ENDS HERE**

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Wow, it got to the fake outrage and manufactured anger shouty stage really, really quickly. What was that experience being an academic going into that?

**Charis Kubrin:**

Yeah, I have to say I've never quite experienced that level of emotion talking about research, right? Which is what I did for about a second, and then it devolved very quickly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It normally has the reverse effect to most people, right?

**Charis Kubrin:**

I knew when I got invited to go on the radio show, John and Ken, that it wasn't going to be a walk in the park. I knew where they were coming from. I knew their viewpoints on this. I knew they were involved in trying to roll back criminal justice reform.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And for the audience, can you explain for a moment a little bit about these guys' radio?

**Charis Kubrin:**

So John and Ken is what I would call political infotainment. It's a little bit of education on various issues, some political stuff, but mainly, gosh ... What's the way to put it? Mainly shouting match ... I mean their Twitter handle says it all. It's like, "kicking ass and taking names five days a week" or something like that. They're not afraid to share their opinions.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

When you live in a soundproof box, it's easy to be tough, right?

**Charis Kubrin:**

Yeah, so I knew that. I also knew though, that they have 1.2 million listeners, many in California, who are probably not quite like them, and may want to actually know a bit more about the issues that are being raised on the show. So for me, it was, "Put your ego aside, Charis, get beat up a little bit, you know you will, but share your research findings."

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And this is a little bit why I wanted to come and talk to you because this is the part I find fascinating, is because not enough academics, and this is me having a dig at the academics listening, will actually go try and reach out to the audience that they want to change their minds. It's just too easy to-

**Charis Kubrin:**

Well there's no incentive. I mean, it's really, in this case with the John and Ken show, I was literally shaking when I got done with that interview because I've never been screamed at and talked over. My eight year old listened to it, and he said, "Mommy, why won't they let you talk?" And then at one point in the show, they called me a snowflake, because I

was pushing back on a comment that they were making. And I think I said something like, "That's a rude statement." "Oh, we've got a snowflake in the studio."

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

They accused you of being triggered, which I thought was hilarious, because they're the ones doing the shouty, wailey crying. But in the bigger picture then, a young scholar listening to that will think, "I am never going to do any kind of media outreach or anything like that ever again," and that's actually the worst. We need to be doing more of it, right? Because the research is kind of interesting, and I think there's something in here for criminal justice practitioners and for police and scholars. Instead of just driving public policy by opinion and anecdote, we can actually test really big, impactful things like Prop 47 with research in a variety of different ways. It doesn't have to be randomized trials, we can do other types of work. That's why your work, I think, has been really interesting, but wow, your experiences are enough to make some people to want to bury it and never let it see the light of day.

**Charis Kubrin:**

But there is a silver lining to that cloud. So you'll hear how painful it is, but what you don't hear, or what you won't know, is that following that interview, I got at least three dozen emails from listeners who took the time to look me up, find my webpage, send me an email and tell me, "Can you please send me that paper? I want to learn more."

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The ratio is not your favor with that kind of listeners, but I appreciate the sentiment.

**Charis Kubrin:**

But those are the ones that actually took the time to look me up and ask for. Okay, right? How many others maybe found it interesting but didn't take the time to look me up and ask for the paper. So the question is, right, there is a positive side to that. You are reaching people. You may not be reaching as many people as you want, but you're reaching nobody if you don't do it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right. And I think it speaks to the value of universities who are particularly poor at that, of doing a little bit more training for their faculty in terms of handling different types of media.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Couldn't agree more. I mean, I have no idea what I'm doing, to be honest. My PhD is in sociology, my area is criminology, I've got the methods down, I've got the theory down. I have had zero training in communicating my findings beyond a journal.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I did a live interview for an hour on radio, on National Public Radio in Philadelphia, and was introduced as, "Welcome, Jerry Ratcliffe, and also discussing this contentious policing topic is legendary civil rights lawyer, David Roskies. Welcome back for your fifth time on the show, isn't it?" And for the first half an hour, he wiped the floor with me. I had zero practice, zero training, but it was a salutary lesson in watching a really great guy in Philadelphia do just a stellar job, well practiced. And I think there's value in universities training their academics to do a better job so that I don't get the floor wiped with me again.

**Charis Kubrin:**

I mean it's like anything. Right, no, I mean, it's like anything. You have to get socialized into it, you have to learn the tricks of the trade. I've stepped in at many times in interviews, speaking with newspaper reporters. I mean, you name it, I've done it. The point is at the end of the day, it's about the research, it's not about how I look or sound or what faux pas I made. At the end of the day, as long as the research is getting out there, that's kind of the North Star, that's the guiding star that keeps me on track around this stuff, so the ego stays nice and down.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And for the academics, if you're working in the criminal justice field and the policy field, that's surely got to be what it's about. So, I mean, there are, for any academics listening, get some media training, practice, dive into this stuff and do it, because if you want to change the public debate, you will not do it by publishing obscure journal articles.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Or waiting for someone else to translate your research. The American Society of Criminology and the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences both work with what's called the Crime and Justice Research Alliance. I'm a member of the board. And the goal really is to be a link between the public and policy makers and the scholarship of ASC and ACJS. And they offer lots of trainings available to members of ASC and ACJS, they offer lots of opportunities to bridge the connection. So, we do need to take advantage of those opportunities that exist.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

To come back to the Prop 47 thing, why do you think there were no significant changes in crime associated with Prop 47 when a lot of people had these inherent assumptions?

**Charis Kubrin:**

I mean, because I think at the end of the day we're dealing with a certain class of offender, very low level offenders, who are engaging in relatively minor crimes. So just to give you an example, Prop 47 requires misdemeanor sentencing for several crimes. For example, shoplifting where the value of the stolen property does not exceed \$950. Prior to that, the value of the property to not exceed was like \$750, so we moved it up a little bit.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The changes in the legislation will be minimal, much more down to situational crime prevention.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Situation crime prevention in circumstances like that, just in making stores a little bit safer, hard to distill from, or, if anybody's listening in Britain, having more police around who can act as some kind of deterrence, because policing has been struggling in the UK with significant losses of numbers. That kind of stuff is going to have far more of an impact than the availability of potentially low level, simply opportunistic offenders.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Right, I completely agree. Now, police officers have told me that literally offenders are sitting there with calculators going up right to the amount, and then making sure they're not going over. I haven't seen any data to support that assertion.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I'm thinking there's a few Walt Disney's out there. Really? It's a nice story.

**Charis Kubrin:**

That's a claim I've heard. I've heard that around at various city council meetings and others.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's a nice story, but it sounds like a fairy tale. Have you got some Walt Disney there? But okay, that's a possibility.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Yeah. Yeah, but the reality-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Somebody will tweet at me to tell me they've had it happened, I'm sure. They are bound to.

**Charis Kubrin:**

I'll let you engage with that Twitter person, that's not my area, but-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I get feisty on Twitter sometimes.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Get feisty on Twitter, you can do it on my behalf, thank you. But we're really tinkering here in ways that I don't think is going to have a huge impact. Now, to be fair and to be transparent, we measured part one, the impact on part one. So

murder, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, larceny, and auto theft. What we didn't examine is the impact of Prop 47 on drug crimes, okay? Because we didn't have part two data. Or things like homelessness, which has become an increasing problem here. So, that awaits to be studied.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And some of the interviews that you had raised those as definite issues.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Yes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But again, let's go back to the evidence for that, rather than simply making blanket assumptions.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Right.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And on the basis of that, that becomes the foundation for our public policy.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Well that's sort of what I tell LAADDA, which is, I understand that you're critiquing this study, improperly in my opinion, but okay. Where's the alternative studies that prove otherwise? I mean, there has been no other study. LAADDA itself has not done a study, and the only other study that's come out since my back and forth with LAADDA has been a study by PPIC, which actually reinforces the findings of my study. So again, I'm awaiting that study that shows that I'm wrong, LAADDA's correct.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Charis, this has been fabulous, it's been very interesting. I'm just intrigued by this notion of doing research in the public policy area, and then just getting this incredible range of reactions.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Well you haven't gotten that with your research?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

No, nobody pays any attention to what I have to say.

**Charis Kubrin:**

I can't imagine that you haven't gotten it on both ends, being in this interesting space that you are. I mean, how do the police feel about the work that you're doing?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Nobody pays any attention. That's why I like it. Okay, because I've teased everybody with the interview that you did, if anybody follows on Twitter, I'll put a link to the YouTube with the interview, and I'll also put a link to it on the podcast page on [reducingcrime.com](http://reducingcrime.com). I can't remember the names. Again, Shouty, McShouty, and ... What were these guys names?

**Charis Kubrin:**

John and Ken. But can you do me a favor and put a link to the paper too?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Absolutely.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Okay. That needs to stand side by side with that interview.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

**Charis Kubrin**, that was great. Thanks very much.

**Charis Kubrin:**

Thank you.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You've been listening to episode nine of Reducing Crime, recorded in California in March, 2019. You can find more podcasts like this at [reducingcrime.com](http://reducingcrime.com) or the usual podcasty places. New podcasts are announced on Twitter @[\\_ReducingCrime](https://twitter.com/ReducingCrime). Don't forget the underscore. Be safe, and best of luck.