International e-Journal of Criminal Sciences

ISSN: 1988-7949 UPV/EHU Press www.ehu.eus/inecs

How do we measure Criminal Policy comparatively?[1]

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https://doi.org/10.1387/inecs.29257

Abstract: The aim of this research is to study indices or indexes that measure Criminal Policy from a comparative perspective. This task is approached within a qualitative research paradigm and is based on a systematic search for indices that will constitute the set of cases to be analysed. Through the study of such indexes, this study examines their characteristics and the underlying decisions that were made in their construction processes. Results show the most widely accepted indexes, topics covered by them, periodicity, sources of information used, as well as funding schemes and institutional support.

Keywords: *Criminal Policy, Composite Indicators, Compared Indexes.*

1. Introduction: Measuring reality through composite indicators[3]

Composite social indicators are scientific instruments designed to provide quantitative measurements of those aspects of reality that are considered normative in nature and inherently multidimensional. Their normative character derives from the positive or negative social value attributed to different aspects or phenomena of reality, such as security, social inclusion, or sustainability. Their multidimensionality implies that these aspects cannot be adequately captured through simple, unidimensional measurement, but instead require a measurement model based on multiple sources of data whose aggregation produces a synthetic or overall assessment (Bericat, Camarero, Jiménez-Rodrigo, 2019, p. 3).

These instruments represent the most complex tools available for this purpose and should be distinguished from other similar instruments. On a continuum ranging from the simplest to the most comprehensive, simple or univariate indicators constitute the most basic level, as they measure a single variable. The number of women who are victims of gender-based violence in a given country would be an example of such an indicator. At the next level are simple indicators based on multiple variables, which remain simple insofar as the mathematical function used is relatively straightforward. This is the case, for example, with the prison population rate, calculated as the number of prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants.

[1]This article is part of the results of a research project funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Education and Innovation, entitled "Towards a Criminal Policy Model of Social Inclusion: Transformation of Criminal Agencies to Reduce Exclusion and Promote Inclusion" (CRISOL)", Grant PID2024-158413NB-100 funded by MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and by ERDF/EU, led by Principal Investigators Elisa García-España and Pablo Rando.

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[3]We will use the word "indicator" or "index" interchangeably, to refer to technical instruments that integrate a set of items or variables with the objective of analysing a complex and multifaceted concept.

International e-Journal of Criminal Sciences

ISSN: 1988-7949 UPV/EHU Press www.ehu.eus/inecs

Next are synthetic indicators, which are very similar but capable of incorporating a greater amount of information. The overall homicide rate calculated in the United Nations Global Study on Homicide is a clear example of this type of indicator (Bericat, Camarero, Jiménez-Rodrigo, 2019, pp. 10 y 13).

Finally, there are composite indicators, which are the focus of this study. These are constructed through the combination of simple or synthetic indicators, thereby enabling the measurement of multidimensional phenomena. Composite indicators may address highly complex concepts that incorporate multiple sub-concepts belonging to different analytical domains. In their most ambitious form, so-called comprehensive composite indicators risk offering imprecise or overly simplistic measurements by attempting to capture excessively complex realities. In contrast, focused composite indicators seek to avoid macro-explanations and instead concentrate on more specific aspects of reality, thereby achieving a more reasonable balance between complexity and precision (Bericat, Camarero, Jiménez-Rodrigo, 2019, pp. 11-12).

Lazarsfeld's description of the construction of such indicators—formulated in 1958—remains highly relevant today. The process can be understood as iterative and consists of four stages: the development of an image of the construct to be measured (imagery), its division into components or dimensions (concept specification), the selection of indicators for each dimension (selection of indicators), and, finally, the aggregation of all this information into a single index (formation of indices) (Lazarsfeld, 1958, pp. 101-104).

Composite indicators are increasingly used (Kampen & Tobi, 2011, p. 1; Greco et al., 2019, pp. 62-63) and recognized for their capacity to measure complex realities (Mazziotta & Pareto, 2022, p. 541), due both to the growing availability of data and to their versatility for comparing different social phenomena across a wide range of objects of study, including countries, cities, governments, institutions, and social groups. From a general perspective, a wide range of actors may be interested in such instruments, including public decision-makers at all levels of administration, organisations concerned with the various issues covered by these instruments (such as NGOs, advocacy groups, think tanks, associations, and platforms), the media, social networks, and citizens at large (Bericat, Camarero, Jiménez-Rodrigo, 2019, pp. 3-4)

The construction of these technical instruments is inherently complex. The main challenges can be divided into two broad areas. First, a complex indicator must be grounded in a robust theoretical model. Only in this way can the process of conceptualization lead to the development of an appropriate measurement strategy for the phenomenon under study. This involves making numerous decisions regarding what is to be measured, why it is to be measured, and for what purpose (Bericat, Camarero, Jiménez-Rodrigo, 2019, p. 4). These decisions have significant implications, as they determine both the analytical perspective adopted and the results ultimately obtained (Greco et al., 2019, p. 63).

Second, there is the methodological model, which encompasses all the decisions required to translate the theoretical model into an index capable of measuring empirical reality. This requires appropriate data, whether pre-existing or specifically generated for the purpose. The choice between these sources has important consequences. The use of existing data transfers

International e-Journal of Criminal Sciences

ISSN: 1988-7949 UPV/EHU Press www.ehu.eus/inecs

any problems of reliability or validity into the index, while the generation of new data increases costs and may compromise its long-term stability.

The combination of these two elements—theoretical and methodological models—produces a specific approach to the object of analysis. This approach is never perfect, but rather the result of multiple decisions aimed at achieving a balance between ideal conceptual precision and practical feasibility (Mazziotta & Pareto, 2022, p. 542). Accordingly, each composite indicator represents a particular strategy that can be evaluated both theoretically and methodologically.

These technical complexities explain why the construction of indices remains a highly contested scientific field (Greco et al., 2019, p. 63). There is no unified theory of social indicator construction, and criticism has been made regarding its two key elements: their construction and the interpretation of their results. On the first idea, the very possibility of measuring such complex realities is challenged (Kampen & Tobi, 2011, p. 4) and, on the second one, worries about the risk of simplistic interpretation of their results have been expressed, especially when done by policy makers (Greco et al., 2019, p. 62; Mazziotta & Pareto, 2022, p. 542) and therefore leading to misguided decisions.

Such debate, connected with a wider and deeper struggle between *aggregators* and *non-aggregators*, is unlikely to be resolved any time soon. Despite that, it is revealing that 1998 Nobel Prize-winning economist A. K. Sen moved from the latter group to the former when acknowledging the success of the Human Development Index (HDI) (Greco et al., 2019, p. 63). This index, with a strongly criticized methodological structure, has captured "media and public attention, much more than would be received by a set of indicators" (Sharpe, 2004, p. 11).

Comparative indices fulfil an increasingly important social function in contemporary societies. They are tools capable of extracting, analysing, and presenting reliable, high-quality information, often in direct competition with information generated by other sources, including artificial intelligence and organise disinformation campaigns.

As an example, according to Saisana et al., a wide range of indexes is mentioned and support EU policy-making (especially the more than 50 of them developed by EU institutions). Indexes are referred to in EU legal documents, preparatory documents (proposals for regulation, impact assessment), strategies and action plans as well as other Commission communications (Saisana et al., 2022).

From the perspective of actors involved in public decision-making, comparative indices provide valuable information that enables the identification and evaluation of problematic situations in specific countries or regions (such as Nordic, Mediterranean, or Eastern European countries). Political leaders at all levels are often compelled to respond to the evidence presented by international indices, whether through public statements, policy plans, or legislative reforms.

Beyond the political sphere, civil society organisations also show a strong interest in international comparative indices. These measurements frequently appear in reports, advocacy campaigns, and public communication strategies. Indeed, many of the existing indices are promoted by such organisations.

International e-Journal of Criminal Sciences

ISSN: 1988-7949 UPV/EHU Press www.ehu.eus/inecs

The media also frequently report on the results of major international indices, often contributing to the promotion of public debate on the issues they address. In doing so, they frequently rely on expert interpretation to contextualize findings and assess their implications. Social media platforms have become key channels for the dissemination of these results, serving as major vehicles for communicating index outcomes in various formats.

Ultimately, citizens are the recipients of all this information, as they show a clear interest in issues related to social problems, public policies, security, and crime.

Aware of this, and to ease the challenge of navigating through an ever-growing number of indexes, the European Commission's Joint Research Centre launched the Composite Indicators & Scoreboards Explorer, an online platform designed to bring together over 150 composite indices, scoreboards and dashboards from EU institutions, international bodies and academia. Specifically aimed at policymakers, researchers and analysts, journalists as well as NGOs and civil society, it provides visuals, *à la carte* comparisons and even AI-generated texts.

Although they are not perfect, these indices contribute to fostering evidence-based public debate, improving the quality of information available to society, and strengthening its resilience against manipulation.

2. The Criminal Policy System

The Criminal Policy System is the set of actors, instruments, and strategies through which Criminal Policy is designed, implemented, and evaluated. Identifying these actors, instruments, and strategies involves great complexity. From public decision-making studies, Cairney states that "there is no natural jurisdiction for policy issues," which means that "sectors and subsectors are (...) difficult to define, identify, and study systematically." Sectoral policies, therefore, depend heavily on the prevailing approach to their management, which is closely related to the institutions or authorities that take the lead in the matter and the tools at their disposal. An example of this can be the Criminal Policy related to road traffic in Spain, which has been taken over for decades by the bodies in charge of managing this activity at the national level, deploying great power to affect other policies and institutions considered within their sphere of action (strategies of education and social awareness, regulation of administrative and criminal offences while driving, the management of a forceful police deployment at the national level, oversight of regional and local policies on the matter, etc.) (DGT, 2026). An enormous concentration of power based on the legitimacy provided by the fight against road accidents, a problem of paramount importance at the national level in the 1980s and 1990s (DGT, 2025, p. 11).

Our intention here, therefore, to define the Criminal Policy system is merely a first attempt that still requires much work. There are some contributions on the subject, such as those by Miró Llinares and Gómez-Bellvís (2022) regarding the actors involved in Criminal Policy, Becerra Muñoz (2023), or Díez Ripollés (various works, see for all of them: 2026), that would require further work and connection with policy studies. For the purpose of this work,

International e-Journal of Criminal Sciences

ISSN: 1988-7949 UPV/EHU Press www.ehu.eus/inecs

however, we will use the definition presented in Becerra Muñoz (2023) to set the boundaries in which international indices need to stay in order to be included in our analysis.

In this sense, Criminal Policy is a public action aimed at preventing crime. It is therefore a field of intervention that stands alongside other public policies, such as economic, educational, or health policy. This definition may be analysed in detail through the following reasoning.

a) "Public action…"

The concept of Criminal Policy is firmly grounded in this expression, which refers to the activity carried out by public authorities. This includes the actions undertaken by any of the three branches of the state—the executive, legislative, and judicial—which operate with varying degrees of coordination but always as an expression and development of prior planning that establishes a strategy to be followed, whether simple or complex.

From a normative perspective, in contemporary societies this public action should be carried out in full accordance with the principles of the rule of law and the protection of individual rights (Díez Ripollés, 2011, p. 5). However, it is also possible to conceive of forms of Criminal Policy that operate outside these standards or even in violation of legal norms (Binder, 2010, pp. 213-214).

The public nature of these actions excludes private initiatives aimed at preventing crime—such as corporate compliance programmes, private security activities, or community self-protection measures—from the definition adopted here, even though they may have points of connection with public action (to begin with, through their regulation).

b) "…aimed at preventing…"

This second part of the definition refers to the objective of Criminal Policy.

First, the use of the term "aimed at" emphasises that crime prevention is not necessarily achieved in absolute terms. Rather, the goal is to reduce the **"frequency and severity of criminal behaviour"** (Díez Ripollés, 2011, p. 5) to levels that remain within socially acceptable limits in a given society (Díez Ripollés, 2011, p. 5; Borja Jiménez, 2011, p. 20).

Second, the concept of "prevention" functions as a conceptual gateway that connects Criminal Policy to the broader criminological field of crime prevention. This is a wider and more diffuse concept, whose definition, scope, and limits are subject to ongoing debate. As a result, its conceptual ambiguity is inevitably transferred to the notion of Criminal Policy itself.

This creates one of the main weaknesses of the definition proposed here, given the wide range of actions that may, directly or indirectly, influence criminal phenomena. This raises an important question: do all public actions affecting crime in any way fall within the scope of Criminal Policy? The answer must be negative. For this reason, it is necessary to return to the term "aimed at" in order to establish a boundary. While public policies may indirectly affect crime, they should only be considered part of Criminal Policy when their objectives explicitly or implicitly include the prevention of criminal behaviour.

International e-Journal of Criminal Sciences

ISSN: 1988-7949 UPV/EHU Press www.ehu.eus/inecs

It may be argued that this approach shifts part of the definition of Criminal Policy to the intentions of policymakers, thereby introducing uncertainty. Nevertheless, this is unavoidable if the aim is to construct a definition that is not only theoretically precise but also operationally useful. In practice, policy objectives are often vaguely defined, multiple, or even contradictory. Nonetheless, some level of analysis of these objectives is essential in order to identify whether a given public action can legitimately be characterised as Criminal Policy.

c) "…crime."

Finally, the third component of the definition delimits the object of Criminal Policy, which can only be those social behaviours defined as criminal offences in the criminal code and related legal provisions.

Accordingly, actions aimed at preventing non-criminal conduct—such as administrative or civil infractions, or behaviours that are socially undesirable but not legally punishable—fall outside the scope of Criminal Policy. Examples include public campaigns aimed at reducing tobacco consumption, preventing sexually transmitted diseases, or discouraging distracted driving.

3. Objectives and research question

The general objective of this research is to systematically evaluate indices that aim to measure elements of Criminal Policy from a comparative perspective. This can be split into three separate specific objectives: 1. To systematically identify indices used in the last ten years in the field of comparative Criminal Policy. 2. To collect information on these indices in order to characterise them. 3. To compare and evaluate these indexes through the comparison of such characteristics.

The paper is structured around the following research question:

> *What is the level of quality exhibited by indices that measure Criminal Policy from a comparative perspective?*

4. Method

This study adopts a qualitative research approach (Benítez, Fernández-Pacheco, and Cuervo, 2019, pp. 258 y ss.), employing a multiple-case explanatory design (Coller, 2000, p. 46). The units of analysis have been selected through a systematic literature review aimed at identifying comparative indices within a broad body of academic publications (Baz & Bartolomé, 2019, pp. 60 y ss.; Benítez, Fernández Pacheco, & Cuervo, 2019; Coller, 2000), according to the following process:

First, we conducted a systematic literature review to identify publications in which relevant comparative indexes were used or discussed. Second, every index was characterised through the gathering of information about it (obtained from its methodological handbook, website or other technical documents). And third, a comparison and evaluation of the different indexes was conducted.

International e-Journal of Criminal Sciences

ISSN: 1988-7949 UPV/EHU Press www.ehu.eus/inecs

Literature search and selection criteria

The database used for the initial selection of the literature was SCOPUS. This **first round** strategy focused on identifying journal articles and book chapters containing the terms "index" or "indicator" and "crime" or "criminal" in their title or abstract. In addition, the search required the presence of "*national" (including variations such as "international" or "transnational") or "compar*" (e.g. "comparative", "comparison") in the title or abstract. All of these terms were searched in English.

The temporal scope of the search was limited to publications after 2015, thereby roughly covering the most recent ten-year period, as the search was done in March 2026. Finally, only studies within the field of social sciences (including Law) were considered.

The resulting search equation was as follows:

> (TITLE-ABS (index) OR TITLE-ABS (indicator)) AND (TITLE-ABS (crime) OR TITLE-ABS (criminal)) AND (TITLE-ABS (*national) OR TITLE-ABS (compar*)) AND (PUBYEAR > 2015) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar") OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ch")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI"))

This search produced a total of **786 records**, for which SCOPUS provided basic descriptive information: As expected, the majority of publications originated from the United States and the United Kingdom. Nearly 90% corresponded to journal articles, and the most frequent institutional affiliations of the authors included the University of Cambridge, the University of Cincinnati, Florida State University, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the University of Leeds.

All these records were then studied in a **second round** to select only those containing the indexes of interest for our work. This analysis was supported by NotebookLM (https://notebooklm.google/), an artificial intelligence tool developed by Google and specifically designed for research purposes. A key feature of this tool is that it operates exclusively on the sources provided by the researcher, without independently searching for additional information. In this sense, its use ensures that the analysis remains grounded strictly in the selected dataset. NotebookLM functions through a conversational interface, allowing the researcher to request specific analytical tasks in natural language. A ".csv" file containing the 786 records was downloaded from Scopus and then uploaded to the AI. The analysis conducted with NotebookLM was guided by the following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

International e-Journal of Criminal Sciences

ISSN: 1988-7949 UPV/EHU Press www.ehu.eus/inecs

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

	INCLUSION	EXCLUSION
Instrument for comparison	Simple indices (univariate or multivariate); Synthetic indices; Composite indices	None
Object of comparison	Countries World regions	Subnational territorial units within a single country
Object of study	Policies of the executive, legislative, or judicial branches Policies at any level (local, regional, national or international) Explicitly or implicitly focused on crime prevention	Private policies Non-criminal policies

All works referring to measurement indices, whether simple, synthetic, or composite, were included in the review. Their level of complexity is therefore treated as an analytical variable rather than as a selection criterion. The analysis focuses exclusively on indices designed for cross-country or supranational comparison, including those applied to regional clusters or international organisations, such as the European Union, the United Nations or the Organization of American States. Indices limited to subnational comparisons were excluded, as they operate within a level of structural homogeneity that differs significantly from international comparative contexts.

With regard to the substantive scope, indices that do not measure components of the Criminal Policy system were excluded. This decision is grounded in the definition of Criminal Policy adopted in this study as "public action aimed at preventing crime" as previously discussed.

The result of the second round was a total of **132 publications**, that is, 17% of the results produced in the first round. The main exclusion factor was the **geographical scope**, with approximately 65% of studies focusing exclusively on national or subnational contexts. A further 17% was excluded due to their technical (DNA or dactyloscopy) or doctrinal nature (lacking operational indicators).

The core of the 132 eligible records is the recurring use of the Basel Anti-Money Laundering Index, the Corruption Perceptions Index (Corruption Perceptions Index) and the RIMES Index for comparing the effect of criminal policies. These documents transcend local case studies to address Criminal Policy indexes at a cross-country scale, analysing samples ranging from regional clusters in the European Union to global comparisons encompassing up to 200 nations.

To check the accuracy of the selection and classification produced by NotebookLM a sample of twenty records was manually reviewed. This process revealed that the tool occasionally generated abbreviated versions of the publications' titles, which made it difficult

International e-Journal of Criminal Sciences

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in some occasions to identify each work in the original database. However, the accompanying descriptions of the indices produced by the software allowed correct identification of each of them. In cases of doubt, additional queries were made within the tool to retrieve full bibliographic information. After reviewing these twenty cases, the performance of the tool was considered sufficiently reliable for the purposes of the study.

Characterisation of indices

The identified indices were then analysed according to a structured set of variables designed for their systematic comparison. These variables were selected using previous literature on the matter (Stefana et al., 2021; Bericat et al., 2019) and are the following:

1. Name
2. Object of analysis (concept to be measured by the index)
3. Creator
4. Managing institution or entity
5. Geographical coverage
6. Criminal Policy system coverage
7. Year of creation
8. Years of application
9. Frequency (calculated every "x" year/s)
10. Dimensions and indicators that form it
11. Data sources 1 (primary/secondary
12. Data sources 2 (subjective/objective)
13. Type of results produced (qualitative/quantitative/mixed)
14. Strategy for the publication of results (written reports, online interactive platform, etc.)
15. Validation methods used
16. Website
17. Funding sources
18. Cost of each round

5. Results

In the 132 publications identified following the second stage of selection, 12 indexes that fully met the inclusion criteria defined in the methodology were detected. In addition to those, another 3 indexes were labelled with a "special" status, therefore 15 will be studied in total.

But not even the 12 first indexes constitute a homogeneous set. Indeed, they are divided into five distinct thematic families, reflecting as many subfields of comparative Criminal Policy.

Governance and Corruption:

This first category comprises three indexes that share a common central focus: measuring the quality of public institutions and, within that, the resilience of state systems to illicit behaviour. These are the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) and the Rule of Law Index (RLI). The Corruption Perceptions Index, developed by Transparency International since 1995 and recalculated annually, is now the most widely used tool globally for measuring perceived levels of corruption in the public sector. It covers 180 countries and relies exclusively on mixed-source secondary data,

International e-Journal of Criminal Sciences

ISSN: 1988-7949 UPV/EHU Press www.ehu.eus/inecs

aggregated from 13 independent sources subject to strict validation criteria. Its results are expressed on a scale of 0 to 100.

The Worldwide Governance Indicators, initially developed by Kaufmann, Kraay and Zoido-Lobaton for the World Bank in 1996, covers nearly 200 countries and measures six dimensions of governance, three of which are directly relevant to Criminal Policy: political stability, the rule of law, and control of corruption. To date, the index draws on 35 data sources and applies a sophisticated statistical model (the unobserved components models) to extract a common signal across sources of varying quality.

The Rule of Law Index, produced annually by the World Justice Project since 2008 and covering 143 countries, differs from the two previous indices in its use of primary data: it relies on both household surveys (over 215 000 households) and questionnaires administered to national legal experts. It measures the rule of law through eight composite factors subdivided into 44 sub-factors and applies normalisation using the min-max method.

These three indices share a common structure: a solid institutional foundation, broad geographic coverage, annual publication, and dissemination via interactive online platforms. They differ, however, in their data sources (exclusively secondary for the Corruption Perceptions Index, mixed for the Worldwide Governance Indicators and primary for the Rule of Law Index) and in the degree of subjectivity in their data, which has implications for their accuracy and international comparability.

Financial Crime and Money Laundering:

The second group is the largest in terms of the number of indexes, with four, and the most thematically consistent. It includes instruments designed to measure the effectiveness of policies to combat illicit financial flows: the Basel Anti-Money Laundering Index (AML), the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Activity Score, the Walker Gravity Model, and the Illicit Trade Index.

The Basel Anti-Money Laundering Index, developed since 2012 by the International Centre of Asset Recovery (ICAR) at the Basel Institute on Governance, and recalculated annually for 177 jurisdictions, provides a composite measure of money laundering risk. It aggregates around 17 indicators across five domains (quality of the Basel Anti-Money Laundering Index/CFT framework, corruption and fraud risks, financial transparency, public accountability, and political and legal risks) using mixed data from composite sources such as the Corruption Perceptions Index or the World Justice Project index. It is one of the few indexes in this corpus to offer a premium version designed for private financial sector stakeholders.

The Financial Action Task Force Activity Score rating fundamentally differs from other tools in this corpus in its nature: it does not produce a single numerical score, but rather a dual ordinal assessment system. On the one hand, it assesses countries' technical compliance with the Financial Action Task Force's 40 Recommendations. On the other hand, it measures their effectiveness through 11 immediate outcomes. Each country is assessed once per cycle of approximately six to ten years, which implies a very different frequency from annual indices. Managed by the FATF Secretariat, hosted by the Organisation for Economic Co-

International e-Journal of Criminal Sciences

ISSN: 1988-7949 UPV/EHU Press www.ehu.eus/inecs

operation and Development (OECD), it covers more than 200 countries and jurisdictions. Its qualitative-comparative model, based on on-site visits and direct interviews with national authorities, makes it the most demanding instrument in terms of primary data collection within the entire corpus.

The Walker Gravity Model was initially developed in 1995 for advisory purposes for the Australian authority "AUSTRAC" by John Walker (Centre for Transnational Crime Prevention, University of Wollongong, Australia). It was later revised by Brigitte Unger and colleagues (Utrecht University School of Economics, Netherlands) in 2006. It is more of an academic estimation model than an institutional index in the strict sense. It applies a gravity logic inspired by international trade models to estimate illicit capital flows between countries, combining data on proceeds of crime in sending countries with indicators of the financial attractiveness of receiving countries. Its lack of regular institutional periodicity and the relative opacity of some of its variables, particularly experts' estimates on the proportions of money laundering, distinguish it clearly from the other instruments selected.

Finally, the Illicit Trade Index, first published in 2018 by the Transnational Alliance to Combat Illicit Trade (TRACIT) and subsequently updated, covers 158 countries across 37 indicators divided into six categories (fiscal environment, regulatory framework, criminal factors, customs and borders, supply chain intermediaries, and sectoral indicators) and is based on a combination of public data, sectoral performance, and expert surveys. The limited documentation of previous editions makes it very difficult to assess its stability over time.

Transnational Organized Crime:

The Global Organized Crime Index (GI-TOC), the only representative of this category, was developed by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime and first published in 2021, with subsequent editions in 2023 and 2025. It covers 193 countries and features a three-part framework unique to this corpus: an assessment of criminal markets (15 types of organised crime), criminal actors (5 categories), and state resilience in the face of these phenomena (13 dimensions). This last dimension, resilience, is particularly relevant to Criminal Policy, as it directly assesses institutional capacities for prevention and response. The index is based on more than 350 expert assessments conducted by Global Organized Crime Index's regional observatories, supplemented by quantitative data. Its results are expressed on a scale of 0 to 10 disseminated through written reports and an interactive online platform.

Criminal Justice and Prison Conditions:

The Index of Prison Conditions, developed by the Center of the Study of Democracy (CSD) in Sofia in partnership with several European institutions and published in a pilot phase in 2015, is the only tool in this corpus focused exclusively on conditions of imprisonment. It assesses five dimensions (material conditions of detention, social activities and contact with the outside world, security, prison employment, and healthcare) through 86 sub-indicators collected directly from correctional facilities. Its objective nature and its source of primary data at the facility level make it a methodologically distinctive instrument. Its most significant

International e-Journal of Criminal Sciences

ISSN: 1988-7949 UPV/EHU Press www.ehu.eus/inecs

limitation is practical: the pilot phase covered only 9 facilities in 5 countries, and no subsequent documented edition has been identified, which raises serious questions about the continuity of its application.

Human Rights and Social Policies:

This category includes three indexes whose relationship to Criminal Policy is more indirect than in the previous categories, but whose thematic relevance is nonetheless significant: the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 indicators, the 3P Index and the Social Progress Index (SPI).

The Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies) is part of the Sustainable Development Goals Scheme formally adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 and refined in 2017 as part of the 2030 Agenda. It constitutes less a composite index in the strict sense than a multidimensional monitoring system. It covers 193 member states through 23 indicators measuring 12 targets, organise around peace, justice and institutional effectiveness. Several of these indicators such as homicide rates, rates of pretrial detainees, crime reporting rates, illicit financial flows, and experiences of corruption, are directly linked to Criminal Policy. Management is handled by several UN agencies (UNODC, UNDP, OHCHR), which ensures unparalleled international legitimacy, but at the cost of heterogeneity in data collection methods across countries.

The 3P Index (Prosecution, Protection, Prevention), developed by an academic team coordinated by Seo-Young Cho as part of a project funded by the European Union in 2010, measures government efforts to combat human trafficking in approximately 188 countries. It assesses three sub-indexes corresponding to the three pillars of the Palermo Protocol: criminal prosecution, victim protection, and prevention. Each country receives an overall score on a scale of 3 to 15. Its data relies primarily on the U.S. State Department's annual reports, which constitutes a dependence on a single, non-neutral source that warrants mention. The index has not been consistently updated in a standardized and widely used format beyond the mid-2010s, which severely limits its use for recent comparative analysis.

The Social Progress Index, which 2026 edition covers 171 countries, measures social progress across three dimensions (basic needs, foundations of well-being, and opportunities) and 12 components comprising 57 indicators. Its relationship to Criminal Policy is indirect: the "Safety" component of the first dimension includes indicators of interpersonal violence and sense of safety, while the "Right and Voice" component incorporates measures of equality and perception of corruption. The index is distinguished by its statistical rigor and by the availability of a retrospective time series covering 2011-2025.

Taken together, these three indexes illustrate a recurring pattern within this thematic family: their relevance to Criminal Policy is real but structurally indirect, embedded within broader frameworks of social progress or human rights. This partial overlap with the Criminal Policy system, rather than being a weakness, reflects the multidimensional nature of the phenomena these instruments seek to capture.

International e-Journal of Criminal Sciences

ISSN: 1988-7949 UPV/EHU Press www.ehu.eus/inecs

Indexes with a special status:

Three indexes identified in the corpus present characteristics that justify specific explanations. Reasons for this are multiple: in some of them their connection to Criminal Policy is real, but sometimes partial or ambiguous; in others, they do not meet the inclusion criteria as clearly as the previous indexes; or, finally, their characteristics make them difficult to place in thematic categories like the ones we have used in this section.

The Global Peace Index (GPI), produced annually since 2008 by the Institute for Economics and Peace and covering 163 countries, measures the level of peace across three domains: societal and internal security, ongoing domestic and international conflicts, and militarization. Only the first domain, which includes indicators of violent crime, political terror, and homicide, is directly relevant to Criminal Policy as defined in this study. The other two domains concern armed conflicts and military spending, which fall under a conception of national security that extends beyond the scope of the Criminal Policy as defined in this study. The data used to build this index is drawn from existing international datasets, expert assessments, and surveys produced by third-party organisations, combining 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators.

The Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI), developed by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and published periodically but not on an annual basis since 2015, covers 193 member states and assesses national cybersecurity commitments across five pillars. Its relevance to Criminal Policy focuses on the legal measures pillar, which assesses the existence of instruments such as the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, and, to a lesser extent, on the cooperation pillar, which includes digital policing agreements. The other three pillars (technical measures, organisational measures, and capacity building) address ICT infrastructure and digital governance and move away from Criminal Policy in the conventional sense. The information is obtained through self-reported data submitted by national focal points designated by each member state, then independently verified by the International Telecommunication Union analysts against consistent baselines and definitions. Such information is also supplemented by publicly available data used during the verification process.

The RIMES Index warrants a separate discussion as well. Developed by a research team directed by José Luis Díez-Ripollés at the Institute of Criminology (University of Malaga, Spain), the instrument is currently one of the very few documented attempts to measure, on an international and comparative scale, the social exclusion generated by the criminal justice system. Its thematic coverage (nine item pools covering control of public space, legal safeguards, sanction systems, the most severe penalties, the prison system, pretrial detention, the legal status of convicted and formerly convicted individuals, police records and juvenile criminal justice) is the most directly and comprehensively rooted in Criminal Policy among all the instruments identified in this study. It is, therefore, not devoted to a specific area or subtopic inside the Criminal Policy system but, quite the opposite, it aims at capturing the Criminal Policy system as a whole. Its item validation system is very sound (two rounds with tens of international experts) but it combines the comparison of countries with other units of analysis (more specifically, states, when it comes to the United States of America),

International e-Journal of Criminal Sciences

ISSN: 1988-7949 UPV/EHU Press www.ehu.eus/inecs

something that sets it partially outside of our inclusion criteria. Most of its items are qualitative and of legal nature, but some of them require the gathering of empirical information, sometimes even through ad hoc mini-research projects. Its periodicity and geographical coverage are very limited, since it has only been calculated in 13 countries/jurisdictions so far and this calculation has not been done in a single year but throughout the last 7 years. Though it must be pointed out that it is explicitly not aimed at being applied globally, but only in "developed Western countries".

6. Discussion

The creation of the fifteen indexes in the corpus spans a **period** of thirty years. The oldest is the Corruption Perceptions Index in 1995, closely followed by the Walker Gravity Model, also from 1995 and the Worldwide Governance Indicators was created in 1999. Two indexes were created in the 2000s: the Rule of Law Index (2008) and the Global Peace Index (2008). The majority of the indexes were introduced after 2010, reflecting a trend of development firmly rooted in the 21st century. Among these, the RIMES and the Illicit Trade Indexes were launched in 2018, while the Organized Crime Index is the most recent addition to the corpus, with a first edition published in 2021.

Nearly two-thirds of the indexes are produced **annually**, while four indexes stand out for their more irregular publication schedules: the Walker Gravity Model, whose applications were conducted on an ad hoc basis between 1995 and 2006 without a defined institutional cycle; the Global Cybersecurity Index, published in 2015, 2017, 2018, 2020 and 2024 without a fixed frequency; the Illicit Trade Index, for which no information on future frequency is available; and the RIMES Index, which does not follow a periodic publication cycle but instead progressed through four successive research phases since 2013 (item selection, expert validation, pilot testing in Spain and the international application in countries and jurisdictions). The Financial Action Task Force Activity Score is a special case: indeed, each country is assessed only once per six to ten years cycle, although the lists of high-risk jurisdictions are updated three times a year. Finally, the Global Organized Crime Index is the only biennial instrument in the corpus, with editions published in 2021, 2023 and 2025.

Most of these indexes have global **coverage**. The Financial Action Task Force Activity Score covers the largest number of countries (more than 200 jurisdictions), with the Worldwide Governance Indicators (200 countries), followed by the Global Cybersecurity Index (193 International Telecommunication Union member states), and the UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 (193 UN member states). At the other end of the spectrum, the Index of Prison Conditions covers, in its pilot phase, only 9 facilities in 5 countries, which clearly sets it apart from the other indexes in this regard. The RIMES Index likewise departs from the global-coverage model dominant in this corpus, rather than expressing coverage as a country count, it aims at measuring social exclusion only in developed Western countries and has so far been applied to 13 criminal justice systems.

Regarding the **sources of information**, three distinct profiles emerge. Five instruments are based on secondary data: the Corruption Perceptions Index, the Worldwide Governance Indicators, the 3P Index, the Social Progress Index and the Global Peace Index. A second

International e-Journal of Criminal Sciences

ISSN: 1988-7949 UPV/EHU Press www.ehu.eus/inecs

group, the largest, uses mixed data. In this one, we find the Basel Anti-Money Laundering Index, the Walker Gravity Model, the Financial Action Task Force Score Activity, UN Sustainable Development Goal 16, the Global Cybersecurity Index, the Global Organized Crime Index, and the Illicit Trade Index, in which every index combines existing statistical data with expert assessments or field surveys produced specifically for the index. The RIMES Index also falls within the mixed-data profile, although through a distinctive combination which is legal and case-law analysis for items measuring formal rules and official statistics together with primary fieldwork including interviews and questionnaires. It is interesting to see how it is different from the rest in the sense that such fieldworks are not necessarily pre-planned but executed whenever necessary to complete an item in a given country or year. Two instruments stand out for their exclusive use of primary data: the Rule of Law Index and the Index of Prison Conditions. Regarding the nature of the data, subjectivity is present in the vast majority of the indexes. Only the Index of Prison Conditions is based on exclusively objective data, such as statistical records of cell surface area, number of inmates per facility, or hours of outdoor access, collected directly from prison administration. All the others use mixed data, such as the Basel Anti-Money Laundering Index, which combines objective statistical indicators such as trade volumes, with subjective expert estimates of money laundering proportions, or data that is predominantly subjective, as in the Rule of Law Index, where scores rely primarily on expert assessments and household survey perceptions of corruption or institutional fairness rather than on directly observable facts.

Almost all the indexes produce quantitative findings in the form of **numerical scores or rankings**. The only exception is the Financial Action Task Force Activity Score, which produces ordinal qualitative assessments without a single aggregate score per country.

The vast majority of indexes feature both a **written report and an interactive online platform**. Three indexes deviate from this dominant model: the Walker Gravity Model, whose results are published exclusively through academic publications, the Index of Prison Conditions, which is limited to a pilot report, and the RIMES Index whose results are primarily published through an edited academic volume rather than a standalone report or platform.

Funding streams are varied but reflect two dominant approaches. The majority of these tools are funded by international organisations or governments (the United Nation, the OECD, the European Commission, and member states). A few instruments are private-sector or academic initiatives such as the Walker Gravity Model, initially funded by AUSTRAC, the Australian government's financial intelligence agency responsible for monitoring financial transactions to detect money laundering and other serious crimes, and later by academic institutions including the UNODC and the Dutch Ministry of Finance; the Illicit Trade Index, funded by companies on TRACIT's Steering Committee; the Global Peace Index which is primarily funded by the family foundation of its founder, Steve Killelea, supplemented by sponsorship partnerships; and the Social Progress Index that is supported by several foundations including the Skoll Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and in partnership with Harvard Business School. The RIMES Index is the only one fully funded by a national science development programme (Spain's State Programme for the Generation

International e-Journal of Criminal Sciences

ISSN: 1988-7949 UPV/EHU Press www.ehu.eus/inecs

of Knowledge and Scientific and Technological Strengthening of the R&D&I System). For the Index of Prison Conditions and the Corruption Perceptions Index, detailed funded sources are not publicly available.

7. Conclusions

This study has enabled us to confirm several key aspects regarding the use of composite indices to measure Criminal Policy. Following a systematic identification of indices used in scientific literature over the past decade, along with their characterisation, comparison, and evaluation, a number of conclusions can be drawn:

First, as previously noted regarding the use of indices in general, there has been a rise in their number in recent years. This clearly demonstrates the utility of indices as tools for measuring complex or multidimensional phenomena. As previously discussed, one contributing factor is the ever-increasing availability of data in modern societies. In this regard, a distinct pattern emerges among the analysed indices: those characterised by highly stable annual reporting, the exclusive use of secondary data (often compiled from other indices), and the capacity to cover a vast number of countries (exceeding 150 in most cases). This approach maximizes the aforementioned data availability to construct indices offering exceptional temporal stability and geographic coverage.

Second, the need to maintain a precarious balance between the complexity of a theoretical construct and the precision of its measurement becomes evident when observing how the various indices under study define their scope. The Index of Prison Conditions and the Rule of Law Index are prime examples of high precision in this regard, featuring complex constructs yet with relatively clear boundaries. Concepts such as good governance, the promotion of just, peaceful, and inclusive societies, or the measurement of social exclusion resulting from criminal justice systems are clearly more ambiguous, harder to grasp, and represent riskier undertakings.

Third, our results also highlight the efforts made by the institutions and bodies managing these indices to disseminate their findings through accessible, interactive formats—thereby ensuring the impact of their work. Although more technical information regarding methodology and results often exists, the primary audience for these publications is frequently non-specialized (decision-makers, the media, etc.); this is reflected in the fact that almost all of them feature interactive data platforms and infographics.

Fourth and final, the organisational frameworks behind the indices studied offer valuable insights. In some instances, there is a specific body or institution whose very purpose is to study the subject matter covered by the index, using it as a cornerstone for public advocacy and efforts to address a particular issue (as is the case with Transparency International and the Corruption Perceptions Index). Other indices emerge from complex conglomerates of diverse actors with significant financial resources, including international organisations, governments, foundations, and even private capital.

The Rule of Law Index, for example, counts among its sponsors an impressive list (only related to the 2023-25 activities): the European Commission, Global Affairs Canada, the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign

International e-Journal of Criminal Sciences

ISSN: 1988-7949 UPV/EHU Press www.ehu.eus/inecs

Affairs, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Republic of Poland, the Supreme Judiciary Council of Qatar, the Thailand Institute of Justice, the United Nations Development Programme, the United States Department of State, the World Bank, the American Bar Association Section of Environment, Energy & Resources, the Barton Family Foundation, the Chandler Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Hewlett Foundation, the Hong Kong Bar Association, the International Academy of Trial Lawyers Foundation, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Neukom Family Foundation, the Nuffield Foundation, the Open Justice Society Initiative, the Proteus Fund, the Sigrid Rausing Trust, Google, Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE), the Jones Day Foundation, K&L Gates LLP, LexisNexis Rule of Law Foundation, Microsoft Corporation, Perkins Coie LLP, Shell International, Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati Foundation, Bolch Judicial Institute at Duke Law School.

This represents an extreme case among the entities studied, predictably reflecting highly professionalised, high-level activity in assembling such a list of donors. While the other indices do not boast such a roster of sponsors, they do secure funding from significant entities, such as the European Commission, the UN, the International Monetary Fund, and various governments.

International indices have thus become fundamental tools for comparing Criminal Policy aspects on a global scale. Existing instruments reflect a diversity of subject matter and strategic approaches. They also demonstrate the complexity of such endeavours and the need not only for scientific expertise (both theoretical and methodological) but also for addressing the organisational and professional challenges involved in securing the stable financial support required to sustain these indices over the medium and long term.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) disclamer

Apart from the use of NotebookLM, which is discussed as part of the methodology, the use of artificial intelligence tools was limited to specific and defined tasks. First, the Claude assistant (Anthropic) was used to assist in the analysis of the identified indexes based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria defined in the methodology. In this context, the tool facilitated the systematic review of each index, but all final classification decisions were made by the researchers, resulting in the retention of 12 fully included indexes and 3 indexes with a special status. Furthermore, for these 15 selected indexes, artificial intelligence assistance was utilised to collect and organise the additional information necessary for their characterisation, relying exclusively on sources previously identified and validated by the researchers. In both cases, the use of artificial intelligence remained subordinate to human judgment which retained full control over the research's analytical decisions.

International e-Journal of Criminal Sciences

ISSN: 1988-7949 UPV/EHU Press www.ehu.eus/inecs

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