

**ADVANCED GCE**

**F504**

**CRITICAL THINKING**

Unit 4: Critical Reasoning

**RESOURCE BOOKLET**



**INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES**

- Read the article 'Street Policy' and use it to answer the questions.

This resource material consists of **4** printed pages.

**Background**

Libby Purves is a writer and broadcaster. She presents topical programmes on radio and regularly contributes to The Times.

**Vigilante**

Someone who feels that the police are failing in their duty and undertakes law enforcement, perhaps using violence.

**Laissez-faire**

Laissez-faire comes from the French meaning 'leave to do', or 'leave alone'. It refers to a policy of minimal government involvement in economic or social affairs.

**Singapore**

Singapore is a city-state in South-east Asia which is extremely prosperous. It enjoys one of the world's highest standards of living and has strict social controls, including a system of punishments for offences such as not flushing a public lavatory.

## Street Policy

Libby Purves

Have the good news first: total recorded crime (in 2005) fell by 1% and car theft and domestic burglary continued a downward trend. Good: domestic burglary is a horrible violation and car crime deeply annoying. Homicide and serious wounding were also down by 10% which can't be bad. Smug officials now parrot that crime is falling and that the "real" problem is people's fear of crime. **1**



But now the bad news. The crimes that rose by 10% in three months were "less serious" assaults on the person, with injury. There is a still bigger rise in street robberies, not necessarily involving injury. In other words, statistically speaking, we are now safer than before in our houses and cars – largely because of sophisticated new alarm technologies that we pay for ourselves – and less safe out on the street, which it is the police's job to make safe. The Metropolitan Police **2**

reportedly says the "main factor" in muggings is the increasing number of high-tech goods we carry. If we insist on owning things, the least we can do is buy an expensive car with an alarm and a house in a gated community, and lock ourselves in. The medieval ambition to build a country where a maiden could walk the length of the kingdom unmolested carrying a bag of gold has clearly been scrapped.

It is the shape of these crime figures that bothers me. The streets must be seen to be safe, whatever it costs and however many sensitivities are bruised to make them so. The alternative is too horrible to contemplate. **3**

Apart from anything else, it is a matter of social justice. For who are the victims, in a world where safety depends on the self-financed insulation of the car or the fortress home? They are the poorest, the youngest and the oldest. Note that street robberies from children under 16 are not recorded: children are not interviewed for government surveys and many of them do not report the moment when their mobile or gadget is taken, with menaces and insult and bruises. When the Home Office did a separate survey, in 2003, it found that more than a third of 10-15 year olds had been victims of a "personal" crime of this sort; one in five had been hit. **4**

The 16 to 25 year old figure was similar, and a fifth higher than for older adults. Some argue that a lot of this is "part of growing up", but a lot of it isn't. It's nasty, it's frightening. It saps trust, social cohesion, confidence and patriotism. Crime against the old is appalling, but right now on our streets it is the young, and especially the poorest of the young, who suffer most. That lad in the hood who scares us may be even more scared himself: another survey demonstrated that child offenders are likely to have been victims themselves. There is nothing for police and government to be smug about. **5**

[Turn over

Streets and parks and alleys must be safe because they are shared: they link us together. Evils flow from unsafe public areas: disaffection leading to greater crime, chronic mutual mistrust, a cocooning selfish culture. Moreover, if you want a political risk as well as a social one, there are aspects of our present governance which mean that unsafe streets cause particularly high resentment and ever more risk of a vigilante backlash.

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You can argue that tolerating a certain amount of lawlessness and disruptive scruffiness is the price we traditionally pay for freedom and privacy. We do not live in Singapore, where muggers are caned and litter louts clean the streets wearing a Day-Glo tunic inscribed, "I stepped outside the law". Ludicrously un-British! On the other hand, at street level Singapore works. It's clean, it's friendly, crime figures are the lowest of any comparable city and a woman can walk around alone at 2am without fear.

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I doubt we want to be Singaporean, not really. We like our freedoms too much. Yet that freedom and privacy – which at a half-conscious level is what makes us so tolerant of lax street policing – is dwindling. Government keeps chipping away at it. CCTV watches us everywhere (though without actually reducing the muggings). We now know that 24,000 children never charged with a crime have their DNA kept on permanent record in case the police ever want it, without any decision by parliament that we should all be on a DNA database, which would at least have to be open and logical. We know that the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency profitably sells our home addresses to small time clammers with criminal records. We are threatened with compulsory identity cards bearing intrusive detail. Whenever the Government can spare any time from writing charters of pet pussycats' rights, it thinks up another way to track, restrict or scold us. It reduces our dignity daily, generally in the name of "security".

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This might be OK if we felt secure. But we don't. They can't have it both ways: either be strict and fair, or laissez-faire. The present combination of skimpy street policing with intrusion and pompous tellings-off is the worst of both worlds. And if the worm turns, it could be ugly.

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