Summary

Justitiële verkenningen (Judicial explorations) is published eight times a year by the Research and Documentation Centre of the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice in cooperation with Boom Lemma uitgevers. Each issue focuses on a central theme related to judicial policy. This issue (no. 7, 2012) contains an edited version of the Prize Winner’s lecture Closing the doors delivered by the Dutch criminologist Jan van Dijk at the Stockholm Criminology Symposium on June 12, 2012.

Closing the doors; towards an explanation of the international falls in crime
J.J.M. van Dijk

In the opening section the author refers to the classical book of Dutch criminologist Willem Bonger on the links between poverty/social injustice and levels of crime. He then introduces his own work on the International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS) since 1989. The ICVS trend data on crime in Western countries during 1989 up to 2010 show a curvilinear movement peaking around 2000. The upward trend seems to track economic growth and to have mainly been caused by increased opportunities of crime. His analytical results concerning car theft and household burglary suggest that the international falls in crime since 2000 are largely caused by improved security. A comparative analysis shows for example that burglary rates have fallen in countries with high levels of home security such as Great Britain and the Netherlands and have continued to rise in low security countries such as Denmark and Switzerland. The author concludes that criminology has evolved both methodologically and theoretically since the publication of Bonger’s book in 1905. Some fundamental principles of the discipline, however, appear to have remained unchanged. Van Dijk’s own work is, just like that of Bonger, policy-oriented. It is driven by the motivation to assist governments in finding better ways to reduce suffering of human beings from crime, either as victims or as offenders.