

Catalogue no. 11-630-X
ISBN 978-0-660-25885-0

Canadian Megatrends

Canada's crime rate: Two decades of decline



Statistics
Canada

Statistique
Canada

Canada

How to obtain more information

For information about this product or the wide range of services and data available from Statistics Canada, visit our website, www.statcan.gc.ca.

You can also contact us by

email at STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca

telephone, from Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at the following numbers:

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| • Statistical Information Service | 1-800-263-1136 |
| • National telecommunications device for the hearing impaired | 1-800-363-7629 |
| • Fax line | 1-514-283-9350 |

Depository Services Program

- | | |
|------------------|----------------|
| • Inquiries line | 1-800-635-7943 |
| • Fax line | 1-800-565-7757 |

Standards of service to the public

Statistics Canada is committed to serving its clients in a prompt, reliable and courteous manner. To this end, Statistics Canada has developed standards of service that its employees observe. To obtain a copy of these service standards, please contact Statistics Canada toll-free at 1-800-263-1136. The service standards are also published on www.statcan.gc.ca under “Contact us” > “Standards of service to the public.”

Note of appreciation

Canada owes the success of its statistical system to a long-standing partnership between Statistics Canada, the citizens of Canada, its businesses, governments and other institutions. Accurate and timely statistical information could not be produced without their continued co-operation and goodwill.

Standard table symbols

The following symbols are used in Statistics Canada publications:

- . not available for any reference period
- .. not available for a specific reference period
- ... not applicable
- 0 true zero or a value rounded to zero
- 0^s value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
- ^P preliminary
- ^r revised
- X suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
- ^E use with caution
- F too unreliable to be published
- * significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Published by authority of the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada

© Minister of Industry, 2015

All rights reserved. Use of this publication is governed by the Statistics Canada [Open Licence Agreement](#).

An HTML version is also available.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français.



Canada's crime rate: Two decades of decline

CANADIAN MEGATRENDS

Crime.

It's reported in the news every day. Sometimes, it's the leading story.

We read about it, talk about it, and wonder how the news stories relate to the overall picture.

And the numbers tell us that the overall police-reported crime rate in Canada has been falling for more than 20 years.

Since 1962, Statistics Canada has collected information on all criminal incidents substantiated and reported by Canadian police services, as well as on victims' experiences.

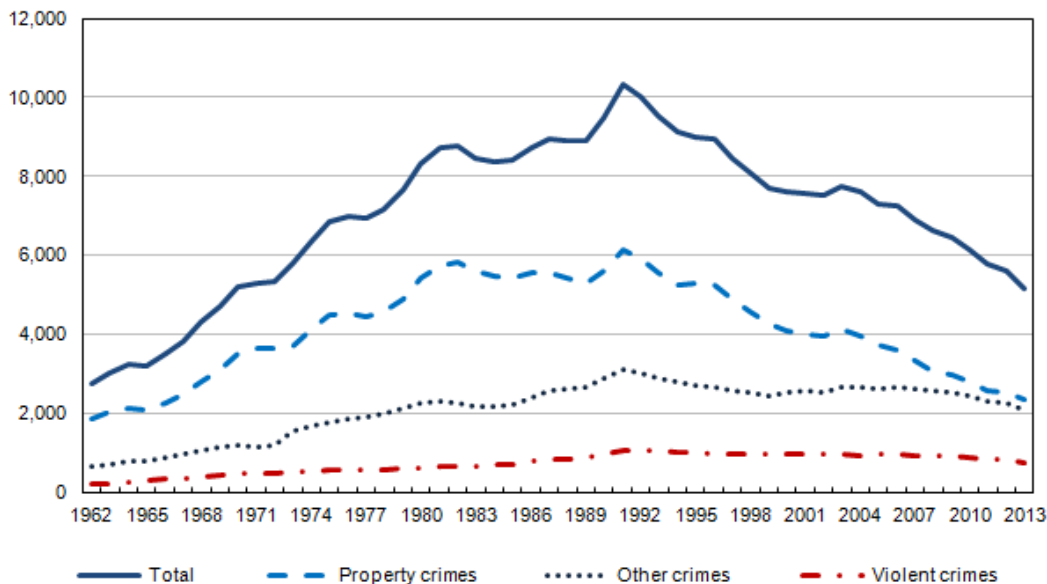
In Canada, there are two complementary ways to measure police-reported crime: the traditional crime rate and the Crime Severity Index. While both measures take into account the volume of police-reported crime, the Crime Severity Index also accounts for the seriousness of the crime.

Since crime was first measured uniformly across the country, fluctuations have been noticed in the crime rate from year-to-year, but a major trend has been observed. From 1962 to 1991, the crime rate increased steadily, and then started to decline. This trend is most notable for property crime, but it is also the case for violent crime and other *Criminal Code* offences.

In 2013, the police-reported crime rate was at its lowest point since 1969

Chart 1
Police-reported crime rate, Canada, 1962 to 2013

rate per 100,000 population



Note: Information presented in this chart represents data from the aggregate Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, and permits historical comparisons back to 1962. New definitions of crime categories were introduced in 2009 and are only available in the new format back to 1998. As a result, numbers in this chart will not match data released in the new format.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

In 2013, the police-reported crime rate was at its lowest point since 1969. Experts have not reached a consensus on why crime has been declining since the 1990s, but several factors have been cited as possible explanations. These factors include an aging population, changing policing practices and strategies, the rise of technology, shifts in unemployment, variations in alcohol consumption, neighbourhood characteristics, or changing attitudes towards illegal and risky behaviour.

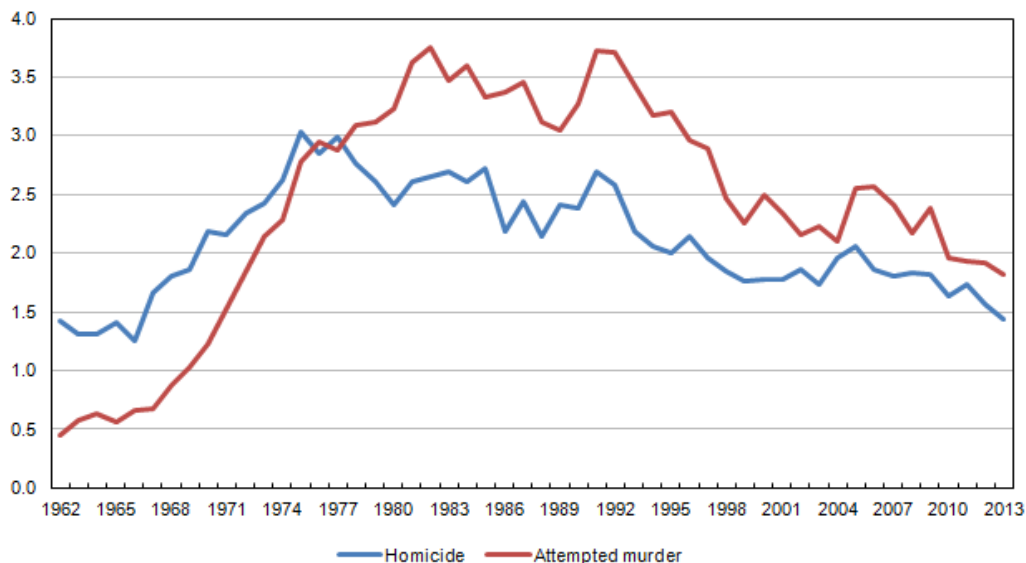
Despite the inability to identify a single factor which explains the crime rate decline in Canada, similar downward trends in crime rates have also been observed in other countries.

Homicide rate also following downward trend

Chart 2

Homicides and attempted murders, Canada, 1962 to 2013

rate per 100,000 population



Note: Excludes 329 victims killed in the Air India incident in 1985. Data on homicide are available back to 1961 through the Homicide Survey, while data on attempted murder are available back to 1962 through the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey and Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

The homicide rate, due to its consistent and reliable reporting to police, is often used as an indicator of the level of violence in a society. In Canada, the homicide rate more than doubled between 1961 and 1975, when it reached its highest point. While there is variance in the homicide rate year-to-year, due to relatively small numbers, since peaking in 1975 the homicide rate has generally been declining.

Homicide was a relatively rare event in Canada in 2013, representing less than 1% of all violent crime. In total, police reported 505 homicides in 2013, 38 fewer than the previous year. As a result, the national homicide rate declined to 1.44 per 100,000 population in 2013, marking an 8% decrease from the previous year and the lowest homicide rate recorded since 1966.

The attempted murder rate also decreased in 2013 to 1.83 victims per 100,000 population, marking a 5% decline from the previous year and the lowest attempted murder rate since 1971.

Similar to the overall crime rate, many countries have also reported declines in their homicide and attempted murder rates in recent years.

Motivations related to the decline

Several factors commonly mentioned by experts as possible explanations for the decline in crime may be related primarily to certain types of crime. For example, multivariate analysis (www.statcan.gc.ca/access_acces/archive.action?loc=/pub/85-561-m/85-561-m2005005-eng.pdf&archive=1) performed by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics indicated that changes in

inflation tend to have the most association with changes in crime that is financially motivated (i.e., robbery, break and enter, motor vehicle theft), while changes in alcohol consumption and unemployment rates are correlated with changes in the homicide rate, and changes in the population's age and gender are associated with changes in the rate of break and enters.

As well, legislative changes introduced in Canada—such as amendments to the *Criminal Code* regarding sexual assault and the *Young Offenders Act*, which was followed by the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* on April 1, 2003 (Department of Justice)—have the potential to affect crime rates by expanding definitions and criminalizing certain behaviours not previously considered a crime, or by decriminalizing others.

Definitions

Crime rate: Refers to the number of *Criminal Code* offences in an area reported to the police per 100,000 population in that area.

Crime Severity Index: Refers to a measure of police-reported crime that measures both the volume and seriousness of police-reported crime in Canada.

References

Boyce, J., A. Cotter and S. Perreault. 2014. Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2013 (www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2014001/article/14040-eng.htm?fpv=2693), Statistics Canada. Catalogue no. 85-002-X.

Brennan, S. & A. Taylor-Butts. 2008. Sexual assault in Canada, 2004 and 2007, (www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85f0033m/85f0033m2008019-eng.pdf) Statistics Canada. Catalogue no. 85F0033M, no. 19.

Cotter, A. 2014. Homicide in Canada, 2013 (www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2014001/article/14108-eng.htm?fpv=2693), Statistics Canada. Catalogue no. 85-002-X.

Department of Justice. The *Youth Criminal Justice Act*: Summary and background. Catalogue no. J2-375/2013E-PDF.

Phillips, J. and K. Land. 2012. "The link between unemployment and crime rate fluctuations: An analysis at the county, state, and national levels." *Social Science Research*. Vol. 41, no. 3. p. 681–694.

Pottie Bunge, V., H. Johnson and T. A. Baldé. 2005. Exploring crime patterns in Canada (www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-561-m/85-561-m2005005-eng.pdf), Statistics Canada. Catalogue no. 85-561-MIE.

Rosenfeld, R. 2009. Crime is the problem: Homicide, acquisitive crime, and economic conditions. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*. Vol.25, p. 287-306.

Savoie, J. 2008. Analysis of the spatial distribution of crime in Canada: Summary of major trends, 1999, 2001, 2003 and 2006 (www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-561-m/85-561-m2008015-eng.htm). *Crime and Justice Research Paper Series*, Statistics Canada. Catalogue no. 85-561-M.

Statistics Canada. CANSIM (database). *Crimes and offences* (www.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a33?RT=TABLE&themeID=2102&spMode=tables&lang=eng). Last updated January 12, 2015.

Contact information

To enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact Information and Client Services (1-800-387-2231 or 613-951-9023 or ccjs-ccsj@statcan.gc.ca) at the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.