

————— **Research Brief** —————

**Comparing Crime and Imprisonment Trends in the
United States, England, and Canada
from 1981 to 2001**

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**Comparing Crime and Imprisonment Trends in the United States, England,
And Canada from 1981 to 2001**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines crime and incarceration trends in the United States, England and Wales, and Canada since 1981. Incident rates for five of the more common and serious offences reported by police in the annual UCR surveys conducted in each country (homicide, robbery, aggravated assault, break and enter/burglary, and motor vehicle theft) are compared, as are adult incarceration rates for the three countries.

The report builds on two earlier studies. The first, "*Crime and Justice in the United States and in England & Wales, 1981-96*", by Patrick A. Langan and David P. Farrington, was published by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) in 1998. A second study, "*Crime Comparison Between Canada and the United States*", by Marie Gannon, was published by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS) in 2001 and looked at crime rates for Canada and the United States from 1980 to 2000. The data from these two earlier reports have been extended through to 2001, and then the results combined to permit a three-way comparison of the trends.

Over the past two decades, the overall growth in incident rates for the five comparable "index" crimes show that crime rate increases for England & Wales have consistently outpaced those of Canada or the United States. When trends are compared, the patterns for these latter two countries were found to have been remarkably similar over the past twenty years – both Canada and the United States show modest increases in crime rates from 1981 to 1991 and decreasing rates thereafter.

Canada's violent crime rate (for homicide, robbery, and aggravated assaults) ended slightly lower after two decades. In the United States, the rate increased significantly the first of the two comparison decades, but reversed itself through the second. Finally, the rate in England & Wales began relatively much lower than elsewhere, but increased by 2.3 times over the two decades and by 2000 had surpassed the American rate.

While rates for all five crimes have been falling in North American, though not in England & Wales, all three countries have witnessed some net increase in their incarceration rates since 1981. The increase in incarceration rates that the United has experienced is far more dramatic than elsewhere: as per-capita incarcerations rates more than tripled between 1981 and 2001 (2.84 times higher), whereas per-capita rates in England & Wales increased by 1.47 times over 1981, and the increase in Canada's rate lagged significantly behind at just 1.11 times higher than in 1981.

Some of the findings are a bit paradoxical: the trends examined here indicate that crime and incarceration trends after 1991 became de-coupled in the United States, which experienced the largest drop in crime rates of the three countries during the last ten years, but had by far the most rapid increases in the adult prison population. On the other hand, in England & Wales, the crime and incarceration rates have remained relatively synchronized, with both rates having increased significantly over the past decade. Lastly, crime and incarceration rates have also remained synchronized in Canada, where both decreased after 1991, after having increased through the earlier decade.

In summary, when benchmarked against twenty-year trends in the United States and England & Wales, Canada's rates for the five index crimes were found to be either lower than in the other two countries, or decreasing, or both. Canada's overall rate for the 3 violent index crimes over the twenty years was amongst the lowest, and the rates for robbery, aggravated assault, and attempted murder were the lowest. Also during this period, Canada has managed to keep incarceration rates amongst the lowest of the group throughout the past twenty years. According to these benchmarks, Canada has been more successful than the other two countries in simultaneously preserving a high level of public safety (its crime rates are relatively low) while also keeping its incarceration rates low.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The analysis in this document is based, in part, on data from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics that has been provided by various federal, provincial, territorial or municipal agencies responsible for the administration of justice. The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of Statistics Canada or the data providers.

This report is also indebted to the work by Patrick A. Langan and David P. Farrington, in their study on “*Crime and Justice in the United States and in England & Wales, 1981-96*” (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1998), and to Marie Gannon, for her work in “*Crime Comparisons Between Canada and the United States*”, (the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2001).

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BENCHMARKING CANADIAN CRIME AND INCARCERATION LEVELS

Crime, particularly the more notable events such as murder and sexual assaults, can generate intensive publicity in Canada. Media events such as these inevitably raise the heat of public debate over what is the best or most appropriate approach to crime and justice policy: Do the police have the tools they need to successfully catch perpetrators? How effective are the courts in determining guilt and sentencing the offenders appropriately? And do our prison services do an adequate job of supervising offenders and assisting them to rehabilitate?

Responses to these questions invariably raise the larger issues of crime comparisons and benchmarks. Exactly how does Canada's crime rates compare with those in other countries? Are Canada's rates higher, lower, or about the same as found elsewhere? Moreover, what about the relationship between crime rates and prison incarceration rates? What has been the experience of other countries with different approaches to court sentencing, i.e., do tougher court sentences for criminals really help to reduce crime rates, and how are crime and incarceration rates linked in other countries?

Clearly, it is important to have benchmarks that show the relative success of Canada vis-à-vis trends in other countries – are we doing as good, or better in dealing with crime and its' related issues than other folk? We can rest assured that no one has yet found a magic cure for crime, but are there some approaches and policies that seem to work better than others. Comparing crime and incarceration trends between Canada and its neighbors is one way to test how well we are doing by way of domestic criminal justice policies and practices.

Of course, developing benchmarks for comparing crime and incarceration rates between different countries poses a number of challenges. First, what other countries do we want to include in the comparison? A decision has to be made as to whether different countries are similar enough so that comparisons would be meaningful. Comparing countries that are at significantly different stages of development might be thought inappropriate because of the possible vast differences in resources available for social programs, the collection of social statistics, differences in the evolution of key social, legal institutions, etc.

For these reason, Canada primarily tends to compare itself with the United States. However, secondary comparisons are also often made against the progress and trends of other advanced industrial nations (such as the G-7), and with Commonwealth countries such as England, Australia, and New Zealand. All these countries are at roughly the same stage of economic and social development, and share many other similarities with Canada, not the least of which include shared cultural, social, and political institutions and aspirations (particularly since millions of immigrants from the old country have made Canada their new home but still identify with many aspects of their ancestral heritage).

Secondly, making comparisons on crime and justice trends assumes that the collection of reliable time-series data has developed in ways that facilitate meaningful comparisons of the crime statistics between two or more countries. Practical considerations, like the similarity of crime and offence classification by police forces in different countries, make some comparisons more practical than others. A search through the official crime statistics of different countries soon forces the researcher to narrow the list of countries where crime and incarceration data can reasonably be compared.

At this time, quantitative comparisons of crime and incarceration statistics exist mainly for Canada and the United States, and for the United States and England & Wales. Other studies have been published that include a larger number of countries, for example the European communities, but these are generally restricted to the comparison of broad trends and not absolute comparisons of crime rates between countries. For example, Gordon Barclay, Cynthia Tavares, and Arsalaan Siddique have recently reported on criminal justice statistical comparisons they have made for countries of the European Union (as well as some selected other countries such as Canada, the U.S.A., Japan, Russia, etc.). However, the authors explicitly exclude absolute comparisons of crime between these countries:

“Absolute comparisons between the recorded crime levels in different countries may be misleading: therefore, only comparisons of trends are normally made in this bulletin”.¹

¹ “**International comparisons of criminal justice statistics 1999**”. Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, Home Office Bulletin 6/01 (May 2001). [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/].

Two separate reports have recently been published that provide direct comparisons of crime rates between Canada and the U.S.A., and between England & Wales and the U.S.A. By combining the findings from these two reports, we can arrive at a three-way comparison of Canada with the U.S.A. and England & Wales. This three-way comparison will be of particular interest, because when comparing themselves to others, Canadians have historically looked both to the South to find out about the criminal justice trends in the United States, and back to Europe to see what we have achieved vis-à-vis one of the original founding countries. Yet, even these comparisons are possible only after some additional adjustments to the statistical series that are normally reported by each country (these issues will be discussed more fully in the next section).

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

No single study has been found that compares the crime situation of all three countries (Canada, the United States, and England) simultaneously. However, two recent studies make a direct comparison between the official crime statistics between pairs of the three countries.

The first, “*Crime and Justice in the United States and in England & Wales, 1981-96*”, was published by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics in 1998.² A second study, “*Crime Comparisons Between Canada and the United States*”, was published by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS) in 2001 and looked at crime rates for Canada and the United States from 1980 to 2000.³

This report builds on these two earlier studies. The earlier findings have been combined to permit a three-country comparison. In addition, the data have been updated in the earlier studies to provide official statistics through to 2001.

At one time, both Canada and America were British colonies. Although each has subsequently developed in unique ways since their founding’s, many common features originally drawn from British political and legal systems are still shared. One other thing that they also have in common is that all three countries collect official police-reported crime statistics using a Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) survey system. This is helpful from the viewpoint of obtaining comparable statistics on crime incidents. Even so, there are still differences in the way that each country collects its data, how specific crimes are classified, as well as in the number and types of crimes that are officially reported in the UCR of each country. For these reason, adjustments to the official series for each country are necessary in order to arrive at common crime statistics for which comparisons will be valid.

² By Patrick A. Langan, BJS Statistician, and David P. Farrington, BJS Visiting Fellow, University of Cambridge. [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/].

³ By Marie Gannon. CCJS Juristat Volume 21, Number 11 (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002 XPE).

Comparability of Offences in the Three UCRs

In the United States, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) collects and compiles national crime statistics from the police using the American UCR survey.

However, the FBI only collects a reduced (that is, reduced as compared to Canada's UCR survey) set of crime information (on eight specific offences). These eight "index" crimes then make up the FBI's annual "Crime Index" report (these offences are: homicide, forcible rape, aggravated assault, robbery, break & enter/burglary, theft/larceny, motor vehicle theft, and arson).

Box 1 - Comparability of offences in the Canadian and U.S.-British UCR Crime Index

Offence	Commentary
1. Homicide	No difference
2. (Forcible Rape)	Not included – equivalent Canadian data not available.
3. Aggravated Assault	The US definition includes assault with a weapon and attempted murder. These were included in the Canadian index.
4. Robbery	No difference.
5. Break & Enter / Burglary	Equivalent to Burglary with minor differences.
6. Motor Vehicle Theft	Equivalent with minor changes.
7. (Theft/Larceny)	Not included – equivalent US and British data not available.
8. (Arson)	Not Included —equivalent US and British data not available.
Source: Gannon (2001)	

This is quite different from what police in Canada currently report to Statistics Canada (the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics). The Canadian UCR collects statistics on 106 offences to the CCJS, as compared to the 8 offences that are included in the FBI crime index. Therefore, comparisons between the U.S. and the Canadian UCR data are necessarily limited in the first instance to these eight "index" crimes.

The different number of offences prevents direct comparison from the UCR surveys of the total crime rates for American and Canada. Nevertheless, comparable offences can be grouped together from the Canadian UCR to create a Canadian "crime index" that consist of the same crimes that the American FBI reports. Note that this approach is also used to produce the comparisons between England & Wales and the United States. However, because of specific survey anomalies, it has not been possible to create comparable series for all eight of the crimes in the FBI Crime Index. Box 1 (above) indicates that only five of the eight original index crimes can be reasonably compared, once statistical comparisons from all three countries are involved.

Three adjustments had to be made to the police reported (UCR) data to make the series from the three countries comparable:

1. Data for the offence of Larceny-theft was not included in the English-American comparisons (Langan and Farrington 1998); thus, it was necessary to drop this series from the three-way comparison as well;
2. Arson was also not included by (Langan and Farrington 1998); for this reason, it was also dropped for this study; and
3. Finally, Canada abolished the crime of “rape” in 1982 and replaced it with the crime of “sexual assault” and “rape”. Thus there is no direct equivalent for comparing “sexual assault” in Canada with “rape” as reported in the USA and England & Wales.

We were also able to extend the original comparative data for Canada and the United States until 2001, and the series for England & Wales through to 2000.⁴ With these adjustments, it is possible to provide comparisons of the crime rates and trends for the five comparable offences (homicide, aggravated assault including attempted murder, robbery, burglary/break & enter, and motor vehicle theft) in all three countries.

These five offences represent a significant proportion of the most common crimes for the three countries. Comparing trends in these “index” crimes will be valuable for benchmarking exactly how Canada compares vis-à-vis two countries with which its history has been so closely intertwined. However, these five crime categories represent by no a complete list of the crimes captured by the individual UCR surveys in Canada, England & Wales, or even the full FBI Crime Index. What are being benchmarked, here, are basically those crimes that can be directly compared between the three countries, not the full range of crimes for which each country has domestic statistics. To this extent, these comparisons are of selective crime indicators, not the total volume of crimes.

⁴ We were able to update the police-reported statistics for England and Wales to 2000, and the U.S. and Canadian data to 2001.

COMPARING CRIME RATES

Table 1 shows the number of police reported incidents in 2001 for the five comparable offences used in this study. In this table, we are looking at the absolute numbers of each type of offence that has been reported to the police in the latest reporting year. We see that the United States has of course by far the largest absolute number of crime incidents of any type. This is consistent with its much larger population (285 million Americans as compared to nearly 53 million citizens of England & Wales and only 31 million Canadians). All other things being equal, we expect that countries with larger populations would have larger volumes of crime.

Table 1: Number of Reported Crime Incidents - 2001			
Country	Canada	United States	England & Wales ¹
National Population	31,110,600	284,796,887	52,939,000
Actual crimes reported or known to police			
Homicide	551	15,980	765
Robbery	27,414	422,921	84,277
Aggravated Assault ²	56,591	907,219	231,735
Break & Enter / Burglary	285,512	2,109,767	906,468
Motor Vehicle Theft	170,213	1,226,457	338,796
¹ The crime data for England & Wales are for the year 2000.			
² Includes attempted murder.			

Clearly, absolute comparisons by themselves would be quite misleading, since we need to also take into account the relative differences in the size of population in each country. To properly assess the comparable levels of crime, we want to control for differences in population size by comparing *per-capita* crime incidents. Table 2 shows how crime levels in the different countries compare when crime incidents are expressed as rates per 100,000 persons in each country's population.

Once crime incidents have been standardized to reflect per-capita occurrences, the United States continues to lead the table with the highest rates for homicide, while England & Wales move to the top of the league for rates of robbery, aggravated assault,

break and entry, and motor vehicle theft. Meanwhile, Canada moves to second for rates of homicide, but still far behind the United States, and also to second for break & enter and motor vehicle theft, but still significantly below rates in England & Wales.

Comparing overall crime rates amongst the three countries, Canada appears to be doing the best overall job of controlling crime, especially violent crime, where rates across the board are amongst the lowest. Canada has not done relatively as well with property crime, where rates are a bit higher than in the United States but are still lower than those of England & Wales.

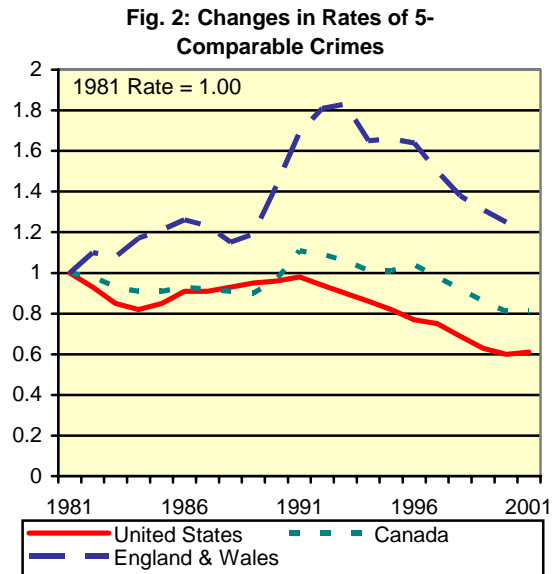
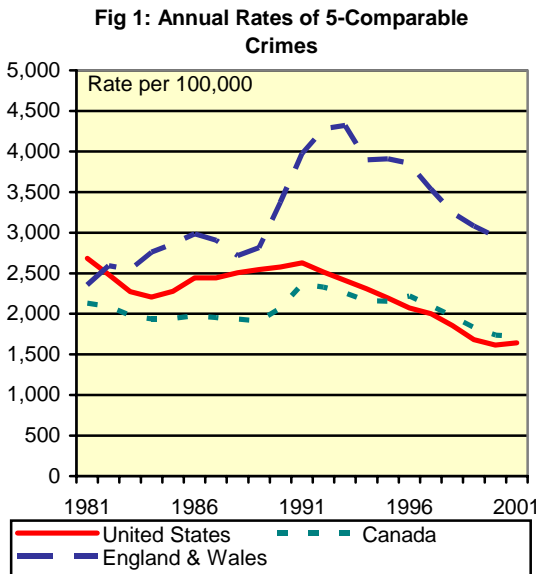
Country	Canada	United States	England & Wales¹
National Population	31,110,600	284,796,887	52,939,000
Actual Crimes per 100,000 of the population			
Homicide	1.8	5.6	1.4
Robbery	88	148	159
Aggravated Assault ²	182	319	438
Break & Enter / Burglary	908	741	1,712
Motor Vehicle Theft	547	431	640
¹ The crime data for England & Wales are for the year 2000.			
² Includes attempted murder.			

By these benchmarks, Canada’s rates of both violent and property crimes are relatively low compared to the United States and England & Wales. Of course, single point-in-time measures do not say much about crime trends.

Trends for the Five Comparable Crimes

The annual trends, for the total index of the five comparable crimes for each country (the occurrence rates per 100,000 national population) is shown in Figure 1. In Figure 2, we show how these crime rates have changes in each country relative to their levels in 1981.

An examination of the rates for the total comparable crimes reveals significant differences among the three countries.



- First looking at overall comparative rates, we see that England & Wales has had the highest occurrence per capita of the five comparable crimes since the early 1980s. Overall, the American rates exceeded those in Canada until the mid-1990s, from which point they have been virtually identical.
- Second, the overall annual rates for the comparable crimes in the United States and Canada trended downwards in the early 1980s, then rose to 1991, and have been decreasing thereafter. In England & Wales, the comparable crime rate increased significantly between 1983 and 1986, and then again between 1990 and 1994, but has also been trending downward since that point.
- In Canada and the United States, there was an overall downward drift in rates between 1981 and 2001.
- The annual rate for the five comparable crimes in the United States declined from 2,682 reported incidents per 100,000 of the population in

1981 to just 1,644 incidents per 100,000 in 2001 (by 2001, the five-crimes index was only 0.61 times its 1981 level).

- In Canada, the overall rate was 1,727 per 100,000 in 2001 or about 0.81 times its level of 2,132 in 1981.
- In England & Wales, the overall rate increased significantly from 2,357 per 100,000 in 1981 to 4,322 (1.83 times higher) in 1993, before dropping back to 2,951 per 100,000 by 2000, thus ending the two decades at 1.25 times higher.

In summary, over the past two decades, the overall growth in the rate of the five comparable crimes in England & Wales has considerably exceeded those in Canada and the United States. When comparing rates for these latter two countries, after edging sideways throughout most of the 1980s, the overall trend has been downward during the past decade. We now turn to an examination of how each country has fared with the different categories of crime during this period.

Violent Crime Rates

The following twin charts illustrate the overall trends in violent crime for each country. In Figure 3, we examine the composite trend for the three crimes that make up the violent index (homicide, robbery, and aggravated assaults). Figure 4 shows the change in the comparable violent crime rates relative to 1981.

Fig 3: Annual Rate of Violent Offences

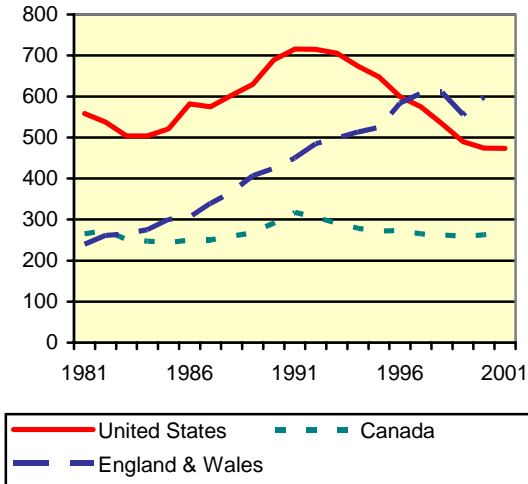
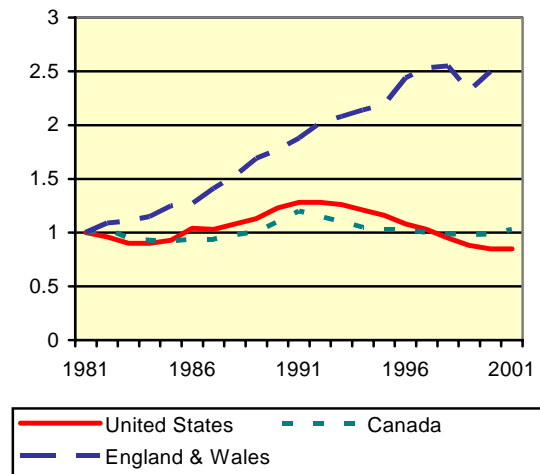


Fig 4: Changes in the Rate of Violent Crimes



- Firstly, we note that throughout most of the two past decades, the United States had much the higher annual occurrence rates for the three combined crimes of violence. The annual rate in the United States started at 558 violent index offences per 100,000 of the population in 1981 and increased to a peak of 716 offences in 1991, before falling back to 473 offences per 100,000 by the end of 2001. The 2001 rate was only 0.85 times the level where it started in 1981.
- Canada started the 1980s with the second lowest occurrence rate (265 per 100,000) for the three comparable violent crimes and ended the two decades with the lowest rate (272 violent crimes per 100,000) in 2001. The rate in 2001 was nearly identical (at 3% higher) than where it had started in 1981.
- In the meantime, the annual rate for the three violent crimes in England & Wales increased steadily throughout both 1980s and 1990s, starting lowest at 239 per 100,000 in 1981 and ending with the highest occurrence per

capita of the three countries (598 per 100,000) by 2000. The rate in 2000 was 2.5 times higher than the level at which it began in 1981.

In summary, Canada’s annual rate for the three combined comparable violent crimes has first increased and then decreased slightly, before ending the two decades almost at the same level as it started. As for the United States, their rate increased significantly the first decade, then more than reversed itself through the second. Finally, the rates in England & Wales started out relatively much lower than the others, but rose steadily; by 1996, it had surpassed even the American rate.

Homicide

Homicide rates are often considered to be the most-easily comparable of international crime statistics, since the definition of murder is more likely to be quite similar among countries, and homicide offences tend to be the most closely tracked and reported by police and criminal justice authorities everywhere. Homicides are also relatively infrequent: they account for one-third of one percent of the total crime index of the United States, for about one-tenth of one percent of Canada’s index, and for 0.05% of the index for England & Wales.

In Figures 5 and 6, we examine the annual homicide rates for each of the three countries and observe the changes that occurred in these rates relative to 1981.

Fig. 5: Annual Homicide Rates

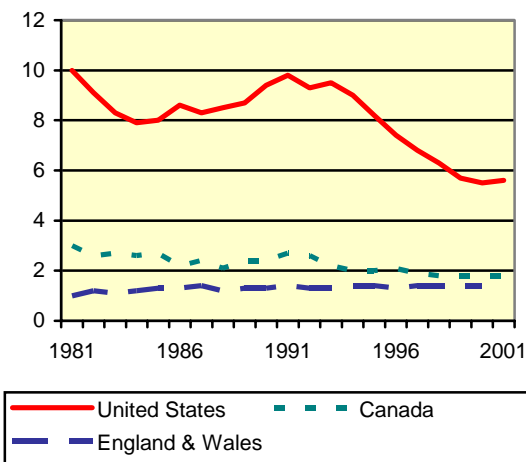
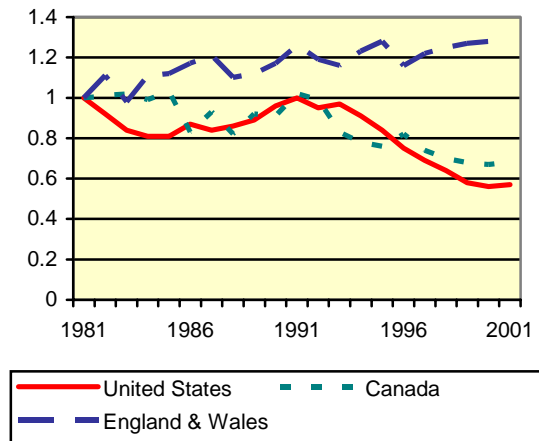


Fig. 6: Changes in Homicide Rates



- The United States has by far the highest rate of homicides per 100,000 persons, although this rate has declined significantly, especially after 1991. In 1981, the rate was 10 homicides per 100,000, and by 2001, the rate was down to 5.6. Which is just 0.57 times the level two decades earlier.
- Canada's rate in 2001 was 1.8 homicides per 100,000 of the population, versus 3 per 100,000 in 1981, which equals 0.68 times the level in the earlier period. Throughout the period, Canada rate of homicides remained low in comparison to the United States.
- Finally, England & Wales was the only one of the three countries that experiences an increase in homicide rates over the two decades. The homicide rate in England & Wales was 1.1 per 100,000 in 1981 and increased significantly (up 1.28 times) to reach 1.4 per 100,000 by 2000.

In summary, over the past twenty years, only England & Wales has experienced rising homicide rates but still remains roughly four times lower than the rate in the United States. As for the United States, their rates have declined significantly since 1981, when they were more than five times higher than elsewhere. Canada's homicide rates have also been falling, but they still remain slightly higher than those in England & Wales and far below the American rates.

Robbery

The second type of crime that is indexed under violence is robbery. There are many more robberies committed each year than homicides. Robbery accounts for about 5-9% of the index list in all three countries (i.e., nearly 9% in the United States, 5% in Canada, and 5.4% in England & Wales, respectively). Once again, the statistics for each country show that the Americans have lead the group in the annual rate of robberies, until just recently, when robbery rates in England & Wales have surpassed those in the United States.

Fig. 7: Annual Robbery Rates

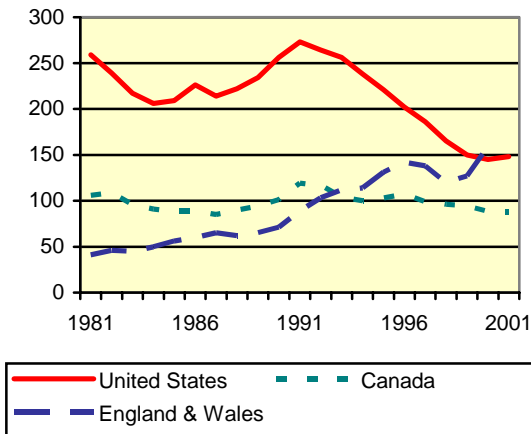
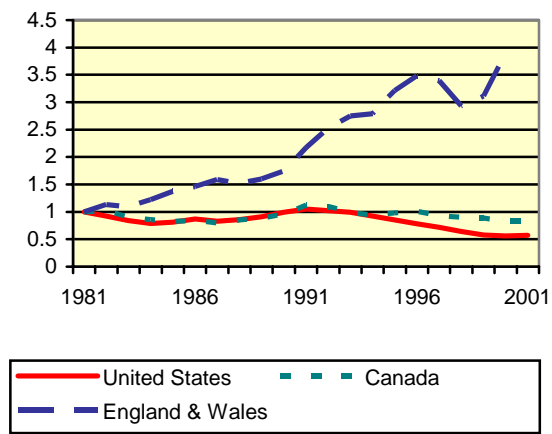


Fig. 8: Changes in the Robbery Rates



- In 1981, the robbery rate in the United States stood at 259 incidents per 100,000 of the population. This rate increased through the first decade, to reach a high of 273 per 100,000 in 1991, before falling back to 148 per 100,000 by 2001. The rate in 2001 is only 0.57 times its 1981 level.
- Canada began with a robbery rate of 106 per 100,000 of the population in 1981 and ended two decades later with a rate of 88 robberies per 100,000 of the population, a level that is 0.83 times what it was in 1981. As in the United States, the robbery rate in Canada also peaked in 1991 at 119 per 100,000 of the population and declined thereafter.
- Unlike the other two, England & Wales has experienced a significant increase in robbery rates. There, the robbery rate increased from 41 per 100,000 of the population in 1981 to 159 robberies per 100,000 of the population by 2000, or nearly 4 times higher (3.9 times) than 1981. In 2000, the robbery rate in England & Wales surpassed that of the United States for the first time (159 to 145).

The robbery rates in North America have been declining since 1991. By 2000 the rate in the United States had even fallen below that of England & Wales. Canada's rate is

the lowest of the three, and has also fallen since 1991, but even at its peak in 1991 never exceeded the 1981 rate by more than 1.12 times.

Aggravated Assaults

Aggravated assaults (which for the purposes of these comparisons include attempted murders) are the most commonly occurring of the three comparable violent crimes. Serious assaults as measured here account for about 19% of the index for the United States, 11% in Canada, and about 15% for England & Wales. This is the last of the comparable offences that are classified under the label of violent crime.

Fig. 9: Annual Rates of Aggravated Assault

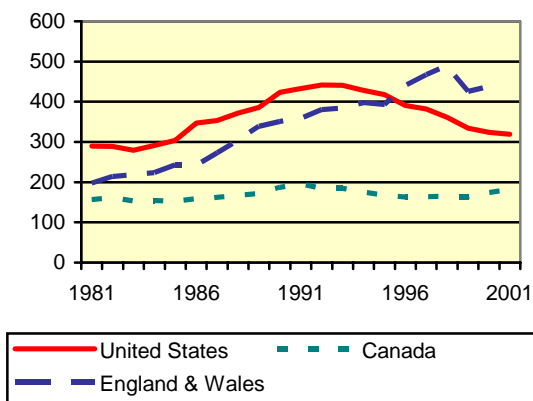
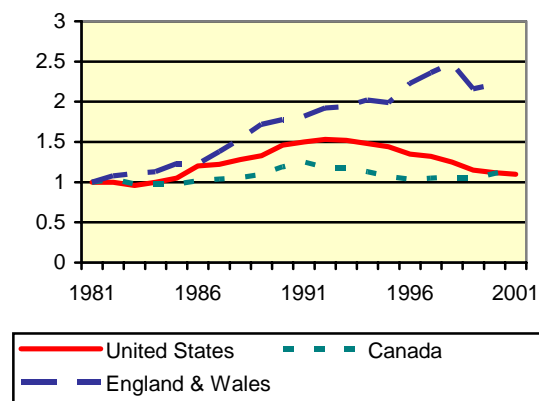


Fig. 10: Changes in Assault Rates



- The rate of aggravated assaults in the United States increased from 290 per 100,000 of the population in 1981 to 442 per 100,000 in 1992, and then dropped back down to 319 by 2001. Overall, the rate in 2001 was about 1.10 times higher in 2001 than in 1981 and ended the second decade only marginally higher than where it had begun.
- Canada's rate of 157 aggravated assaults per 100,000 of the population in 1981 was the lowest of the group. It ended the second decade higher at 182, marginally (1.16 times) higher than when it had begun twenty years earlier, although still the lowest of the three.

- England & Wales began in 1981 with a rate of 197 aggravated assaults per 100,00 of the population and ended two decades late (in 2000) with a rate of 438 per 100,000, which was slightly more than twice (2.22 times) the level with which it had started.

The aggravated assault rate for the United States was the highest of all three countries until around 1995, when it was surpassed by England & Wales. Canada showed only a modest increase over two decades and trailed the group by a significant margin throughout the period.

In summary, England & Wales has witnessed the most increases in violent crime rates of any country since 1981. Indeed, violent crime rates for two of the three components of the violent crime index (robbery and aggravated assault) are now significantly higher than in North America. The sole exception is homicide, where the United States rates continue to lead the rest by a wide margin, even though those rates have dropped quite rapidly over the last decade. In general, Canada has had either the lowest or second lowest rate for violent crimes and has experienced mainly falling rates of violent crime since 1991.

Property Crime Rates

There were only two property crimes for which rates could be compared for all three countries (larceny/theft, which is part of the FBI crime index, could not be obtained for all three countries).⁵ For this reason, a combined property crime index was not created. In this section, we examine rates for the common property crimes of burglary/break and enter, and motor vehicle theft.

⁵ The CCJS provided comparable rates of theft/larceny for Canada and the United States (Gannon, 2001), but no data on larceny/theft was included in the comparison of the United States and England (Langan and Farrington, 1998). Because of this absence, we have not been able to include this crime in the three-country comparisons.

Burglary/Break and Enter Rates

The offence of burglary typically accounts for the largest single number of incidents in this comparative index. Burglary makes up 44% of the comparable index in the United States, about 53% of the index in Canada, and about 58% of the index of England & Wales. The annual rates reported for each country are shown in Figure 11, along with the changes in the annual rate from 1981 (Figure 12).

Fig 11: Annual Rates of Burglary

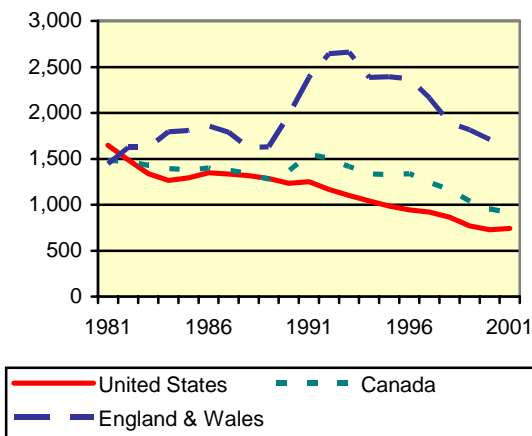
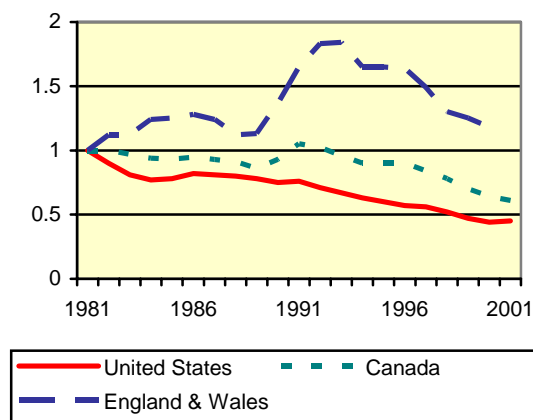


Fig. 12: Changes in Burglary Rate



- The burglary rate in the United States has been on the decline ever since 1981. In that year, there were 1,649 burglaries for every 100,000 persons in the population, and by 2001, this rate had fallen to 741 per 100,000, or to only 0.45 times its 1981 level.
- The rate in Canada in 1981 was 1,480 per 100,000, a rate that is very similar to the American rate. However, the rate in Canada bumped up around 1991, before falling back down. By 2001, it was at 908 per 100,000 of the population, which is still higher than in the United States, but just 0.61 times its 1981 level.
- Finally, burglary rates in England & Wales have had two run-ups since 1981, the second of which peaked at 2,663 burglaries per 100,000 of the population in 1993, before falling back to 1,712 in 2000 (an overall modest gain of 1.18 times the 1,447 per 100,000 of 1981).

In summary, burglary rates make up a larger proportion of the composite crime index in England & Wales (58%). Since 1981, English rates have consistently been higher than in North America.

Motor Vehicle Theft Rates

Motor vehicle thefts represent the second largest number of incidents in the composite crime indexes. Moreover, their contribution in Canada is higher than elsewhere: they account for almost 32% of Canada’s index, versus 26% in the United States, and just 22% in England & Wales. The comparable trends are shown in Figure 13 and 14.

Fig. 13: Annual Rate of Motor Vehicle Theft

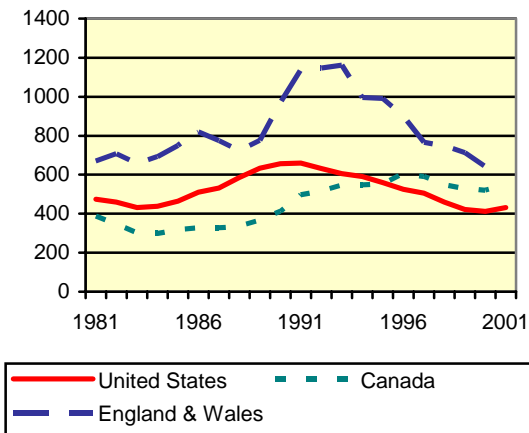
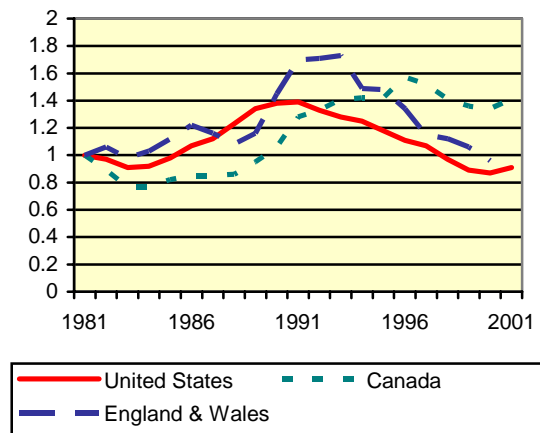


Fig. 14: Changes in MV Theft Rate



- The United States, at 475 per 100,000, had the second highest rate in 1981, but after peaking at 659 in 1991, it has fallen to the lowest place at 431 per 100,000 in 2001 (down overall by 0.91 times where it started in 1981).
- The motor vehicle theft rate placed Canada at the bottom of the table in 1981, at 388 motor vehicle thefts for every 100,000 of the population, but this has gradually increased over the two decades, to reach 547 per 100,000 by 2001 (1.41 times higher).

- Finally, the rate of motor vehicle thefts in England & Wales has exceeded that of North America every year since 1981. The rate rose from 670 per 100,000 population in 1981 to a peak of 1,162 per every 100,000 in 1993, and has since fallen back to 640 in 2000 (about 0.96 times the 1981 level).

Canada has led the trend in motor vehicle thefts, where rates per 100,000 have generally been increasing each year for most of the past twenty years. This likely explains why motor vehicle thefts today account for nearly 32% of the total crime index in Canada, versus about 26% and 22% for the United States and England & Wales, respectively.

PRISON POPULATION TRENDS

Previous studies of prison population have found that incarceration rates in the United States are typically amongst the highest in the world. Although the incarceration rates for Canada and England & Wales remain at the high end for Western European countries, they are still only about one-fifth of American's current rate.

These are the finding of a recent Home Office study by Gordon C. Barclay and Cynthia Tavares, *International comparisons of criminal justice statistics 2000*.⁶ Roy Walmsley has reported similar statistics in the Home Office *World Prison Population List (third edition)*.⁷ We have drawn the data for our comparisons primarily from Barclay and Tavares, supplemented with more recent official statistics where these have become available.⁸

Statistics on prisoner counts show that the United States had an incarceration rate of nearly 700 prisoners (in jails, and State or Federal prisons) for every 100,000 of the population in 2001. For the same period, the comparable rate in Canada was of 101 prisoners incarcerated in adult Provincial and Federal facilities per 100,000 of the population. The rate for England & Wales in 2001 was 126 prisoners for every 100,000 of the population.

⁶ Home Office Statistical Bulletin 05/02, 12 July 2002.

⁷ Home Office Finding Number 166, 2002.

⁸ For example: **Adult Correctional Services in Canada, 2001-02**, CCJS (Statistics Canada); and **Prisoners in 2001**, BJS (US Department of Justice). Caution must be exercised when comparing correctional systems in different countries. For example, although counting prisoners may seem straightforward, in fact, prison systems vary enormously between countries and even within single countries. Adult prisoners in Canada fall under at least fourteen independent jurisdictions, each of which maintain their own prison counts and statistics. In the United States, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, fifty different States, and hundreds of local governments share jurisdiction over some part of adult prisoner population and have their own ways of keeping statistics. Only in England and Wales is there a relatively unitary system for adult prisoners.

Figure 15 shows the annual incarceration rates for the three countries, and in Figure 16, we see the changes in annual incarceration rates since 1982.

Fig. 15: Annual Rate of Incarceration

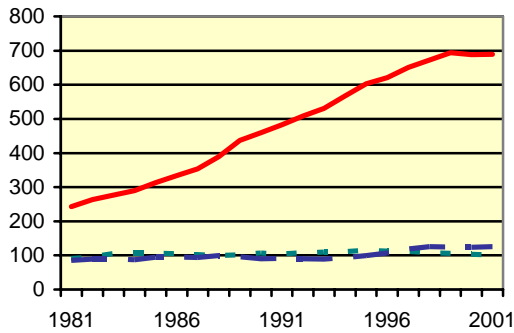
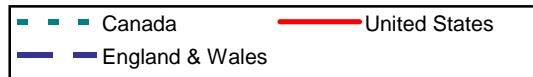
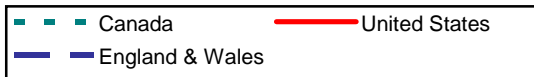
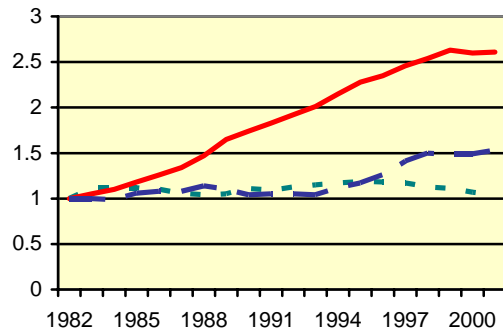


Fig. 16: Changes in the Incarceration Rate



- In 1981, the United States incarceration rate was 243 prisoners for every 100,000 of the population. The rate has increased virtually every year from 1981 until 1999, when it appears to have peaked at about 694 per 100,000 of the population. The rate has fallen slightly thereafter, to remain at 689 prisoners per 100,000 of the population by 2001. Between 1981 and 2001, the United States incarceration rate increased 2.8 times.
- The incarceration rate in Canada in 1981 was 91 prisoners per 100,000 of the population. This rate increased gradually, before reaching 114 prisoners per 100,000 of the population in 1995. Since then, the Canadian incarceration rate has been gradually falling back, to a level of about 101 prisoners per 100,000 of the population by 2001. The 2001 rate is about 1.11 times its level in 1981.
- Finally, the incarceration rate in England & Wales in 1982 was 85 prisoners per 100,000 of the population. This rate at first increased gradually, but by the mid-1990s started rising rapidly, to reach about 126

prisoners per 100,000 in 1998, a level where it has remained until 2001. The 2001 rate was 1.47 times the level in 1981.

Overall, the incarceration rate of all three countries increased since 1981, but the increase was much more dramatic in the United States. The per-capita use of incarceration in the United States nearly tripled (2.8 times higher) between 1981 and 2001. In 1982, the incarceration rate of the United States was 2.8 times higher than the rate of Canada and 3 times the rate of England & Wales. By 2001, the rate in the United States had grown so much more rapidly than in the other two countries that it was now nearly seven times (6.8) the rate in Canada and 5.5 times higher than in England & Wales.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It has been somewhat of a surprise to find that, over the past twenty years, the overall lead for crime rate growth (looking at just the five comparable crimes examined here) goes to England & Wales. Over the past two decades, and especially in the last ten years, the crime rate for England & Wales has consistently shown increases that have outpaced annual growth in either Canada or the United States. When trends for these latter two countries are examined, the patterns for both countries are found to have been remarkably similar over the past twenty years: they indicate a modest to negligible growth in crime rates throughout the 1980s, followed by de-creasing rates in the 1990s.

Comparing the rates for the three comparable violent crimes, Canada's annual rate ended slightly lower after two decades (0.96 times 1981); the rate in the United States increased significantly the first decade, then reversed itself through much of the second and ended at only 0.88 times its 1981 level; and finally, the rate in England & Wales started out relatively much lower, but increased by 2.3 times, to surpass the American rate by 2000.

However, for homicides, the rates in England & Wales were relatively stable for twenty years and remain roughly four times lower than the rates in the United States, which have declined significantly since 1981. Canada's homicide rate is slightly higher than England & Wales, but still far below the American rate, and has been generally declining since 1981.

The rates for robbery and serious assaults in North America all peaked around 1991, and have since fallen back to levels near what they were in 1981. In contrast, in England & Wales, these rates have all increased significantly. By 2001, their crime rates for robbery and serious assaults are higher per capita than even in the United States, as are rates for burglary and motor vehicle theft.

While rates for serious crime have fallen in two of the three countries, the past two decades has witnessed a net increase in the incarceration rate for all three countries. In this instance, the increased incarceration rates experienced by the United States was far more dramatic than elsewhere: per-capita incarcerations rates almost tripled (2.84 times higher), whereas per-capita rates in England & Wales increased by nearly 1.5 times over 1981 and Canada's rates were just 1.11 times higher by 2001.

These results present something of a paradox. In England & Wales, crime and incarceration rates have remained relatively synchronized, with both rates increasing in parallel since 1981. Crime and incarceration rates have also remained relatively synchronized in Canada, where both rates increased from 1981 to 1991, before decreasing in the decade following. On the other hand, in the United States crime and incarceration rates appear to have de-coupled after 1991. The United States experienced a large drop in crime rates during the last decade, like Canada, but unlike Canada, they continued to have rapid increases in their incarceration rates after 1991.

A final consideration is population dynamics — population growth will account for some difference in the absolute growth of crime and prison populations, since the population of the two North American countries increase at much higher rates than it did in England & Wales over the two decades. Canada had the highest increases (the population by 2001 was 1.25 times higher than in 1981), and there were almost identical increases in the United States population (an increase of 1.24 times, over the same period), while population growth in England & Wales lagged considerably at just 1.07 times higher. Yet, differences in population growth was clearly not the major factor distinguishing these countries, since England & Wales had the slowest-growing population but the largest per capita increases in crime.

This suggests that if population growth contributed to crime trends, it had more to do with demographic change than absolute growth. For example, the more rapid population growth experienced in Canada and the United States was accompanied by a rapid population ageing: the very large post-war baby boom bulge experience by both countries finally aged through the higher-risk age groups (i.e., the ages from 15-25) and began to swell the ranks of the lower-risk age groups (the population over 50 years of age). In Canada, for example, although the population increased significantly since 1981, almost all this increase has occurred in the population ages 50 and older, whereas the population ages 18-29 has not increased at all. The relationship between crime trends and demographic trends, especially as these have influenced the different historical crime and incarceration trends experienced by Europe versus America, is an area that would clearly benefit from further research.

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