

BBC Radio 4- More or Less: Is Crime Rising?

7th May 2017



Adapted from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08ns2lw>

Listen to an interview with Crime Policy expert Tom Gash about crime statistics and make notes about the following:

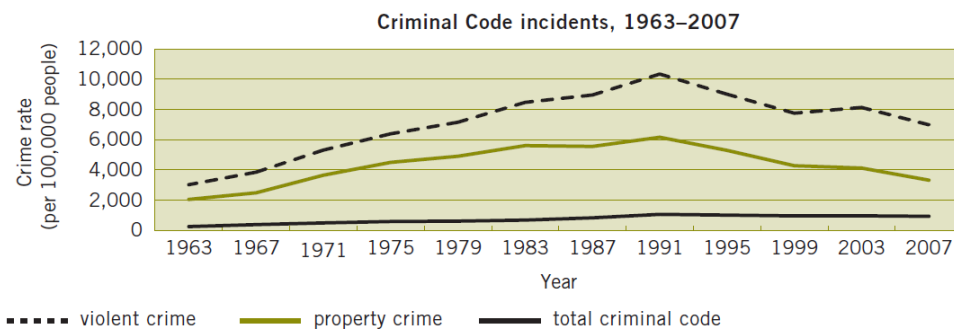
- a) Statistics sources:
- b) Police recording practices:
- c) Homicide:
- d) Hillsborough*:
- e) Harassment:
- f) What is the final conclusion about crime statistics?

* Hillsborough: It refers to the so-called Hillsborough disaster, a fatal human crush during a football match at Hillsborough Stadium in Sheffield, South Yorkshire, England in 1989.

WRITING

Write a paragraph to describe the graph below. Begin with the provided topic sentence and prompts, and indicate possible reasons for the highs and lows in your supporting details.

The crime rate has changed significantly over the past 45 years.



Data Source: Statistics Canada. Total criminal code refers to crimes addressed by criminal law and excludes traffic offences.

Adapted from: <https://docplayer.net/21167823-Chapter-1-academic-skills-writing-paragraphs-and-essays-linc-6-7.html>

KEY

a) Statistics sources: 1) Very big survey that not all countries actually have, but we have. It's called the Crime Survey of England and Wales and is asking people about their experience of crime.

2) Police recorded crime. The crime that's reported to the police and they decide it's a crime and they record it as such.

b) Police recording practices:

In the police data you see rises across a very wide range of offences including burglary and vehicle crime, which we haven't seen rise for about 25 years. We should take it with a pinch of salt.

Over the last few years police have been changing their recording practices quite a bit, and it's very hard to know whether these are reliable figures, because if we look at the other source, people aren't reporting that they're experiencing more vehicle crime or burglary.

c) Homicide: Up 21%. You need to read the footnotes. It has risen from 576 offences in 2015 to 697 in 2016. Huge increase of 21%. What looked like a 21% increase and quite worrying is actually a 4%. It's not statistically significant as an increase.

d) Hillsborough: 96 of those homicides relate to Hillsborough. Hillsborough was long time ago, but the way that recording for homicides work is it counts in the years you classify something as a homicide. Homicide includes manslaughter offences. People who died at Hillsborough – this has clearly been a long-running quest to have an enquiry, to have those deaths classified as manslaughter. But they have finally been classified as manslaughter, finally been included on the figures, but attributed to 2016.

That happens occasionally. It's very rarely, but we get a scale of shift like this. Another example is Harold Shipman, who was murdering people over a long period of time as a doctor, but they all showed up in the figures in one year.

e) Harassment: Reasons we shouldn't trust 19% is because a lot of that increase is about violence without injury, and particularly cases of harassment, that people don't think of necessarily as being to do with violence, although they are obviously serious criminal acts.

Police have not recorded these crimes consistently over the years. Police are starting to take seriously crimes that previously they might have not taken as seriously.

Harassment about 30,000 cases 10-12 years ago; now more than 200,000 cases. It's hard to believe that harassment has become 7 times more serious a problem, but maybe not hard to believe it is taken 7 times more seriously.

Not known impact of internet harassment- You'd suspect that abuse on twitter or other social media sites is being taken more seriously now than it was at the beginning of social media.

Conclusion: Crime has fallen dramatically over the last 25 years but over the last few years there are signs that we may be reaching a plateau.