
CRIME TRENDS IN SINGAPORE

by

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INTRODUCTION

Singaporeans enjoy a safe living environment with low incidence of crime. This paper compares the crime situation in Singapore vis-a-vis selected countries. It describes the crime trends in Singapore during the last decade and examines the incidence of juvenile delinquency. Data on the perceptions of Singaporeans on public safety and security are provided.

Singapore's crime statistics are compiled from reports to the police. This paper presents crime rates for Singapore using the total population as base. For the other countries under comparison, the crime data are obtained from the Fifth United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems.

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

It is often difficult to make international comparison of crime trends due to differences in crime recording practices. While major offences like robbery, murder and housebreaking are

likely to be reported, many petty crimes and offences such as theft may go unrecorded. Comparison of specific major criminal offences would therefore present a more meaningful picture of the underlying crime situation.

Violent Crimes

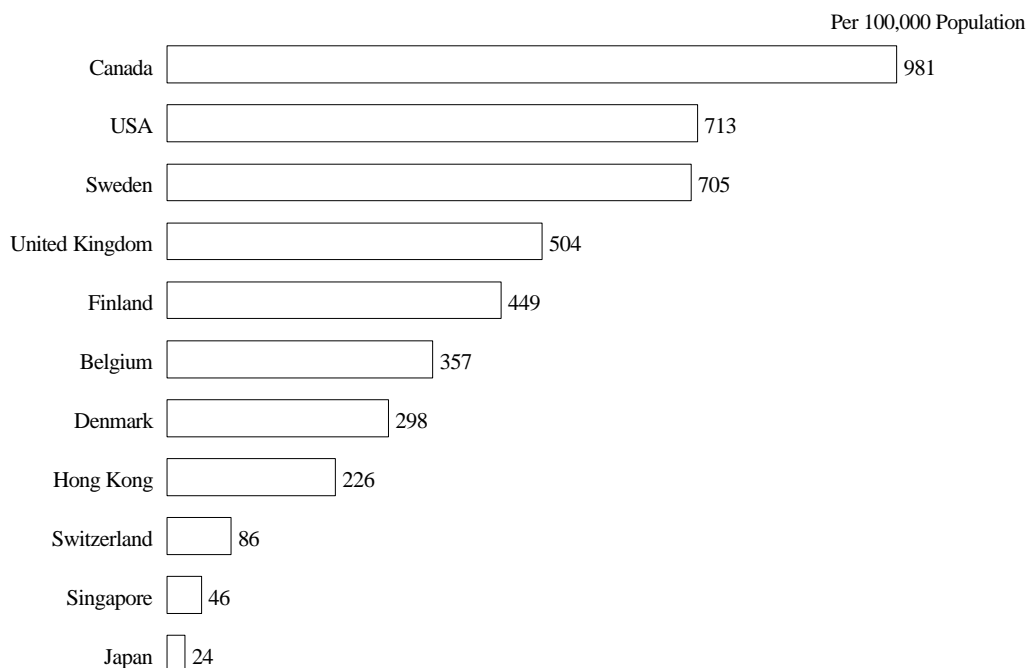
The incidence of violent crime in Singapore is much lower than that for the developed countries (Chart 1). In 1994, there were 46 cases of violent crime (murder, assault, rape and robbery) per 100,000 population in Singapore. This was less than 10% of the rate in the United States (713 per 100,000) and Sweden (705 per 100,000) and about half that of Switzerland (86 per 100,000). In Asia, only Japan had a lower rate of violent crime (24 per 100,000) than Singapore. Hong Kong's violent crime rate of 226 per 100,000 is nearly 5 times that of Singapore.

In Singapore, robbery was the more prevalent type of violent crime; the robbery rate was 24 per 100,000 compared with 18 per 100,000 for assault (Table 1). This was unlike most of the other countries where assault accounted for higher incidence of violent crime. In Sweden for

example, the crime rate for assault was 611 per 100,000 compared with a robbery rate of just 61. Within Asia, both Hong Kong

and Japan had higher rates for assault than robbery (119 vis-à-vis 103 and 19 vis-à-vis 2.2 respectively).

CHART 1 VIOLENT CRIME RATE, 1994



Source : Fifth UN Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems

TABLE 1 CRIME RATES FOR MAJOR OFFENCES, 1994

Per 100,000 Population

Country/City	Homicide	Assault	Rape	Robbery
Canada	2.0	771.4	108.3	98.8
United States	9.0	427.1	39.2	237.5
Sweden	12.0	611.2	20.6	60.7
United Kingdom	2.0	377.7	10.0	114.5
Hong Kong	1.6	118.8	1.6	103.4
Switzerland	2.3*	51.6	3.9	27.9
Singapore	1.5	17.9	2.4	24.1
Japan	1.4	19.3	1.3	2.2

* Excludes non-intentional homicide.

Source : Fifth UN Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems

Property Crimes

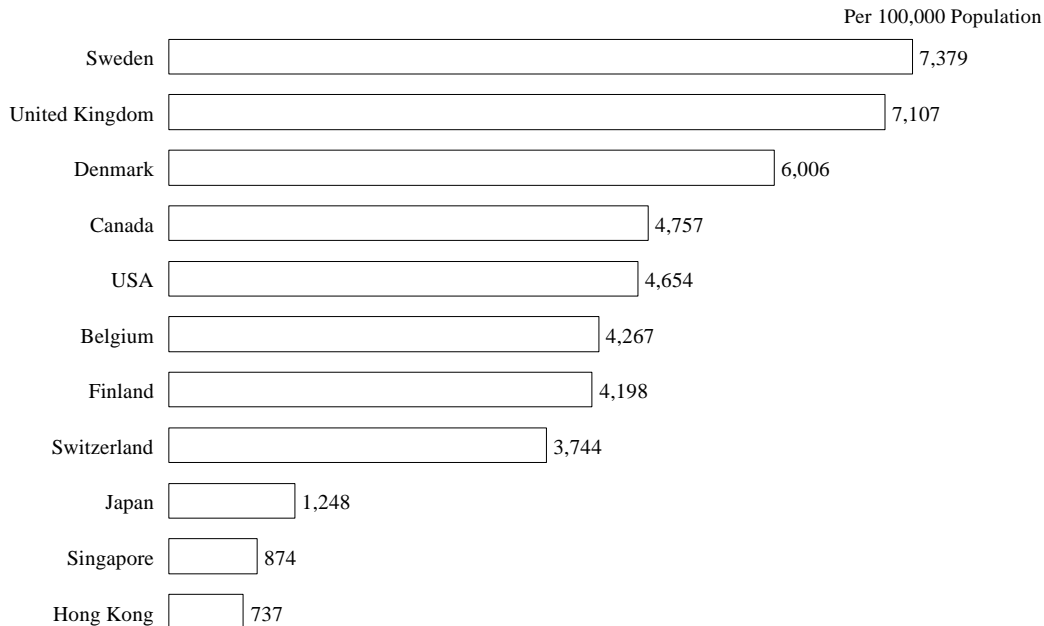
Singapore also has lower rate of property crimes (burglary and theft). Our rate of 874 per 100,000 population in 1994 was lower than that for Japan (1,248) and all the other developed countries under comparison (Chart 2). Surprisingly, Hong Kong had a lower property crime rate of 737. Hong Kong's theft rate of 514 per 100,000 was much lower than that for Singapore (801) and Japan (1,050). In contrast, Hong Kong's burglary rate was 3 times that of Singapore – 223 as against 73 per 100,000.

SINGAPORE'S CRIME TRENDS

Decline in Overall Crime Rate

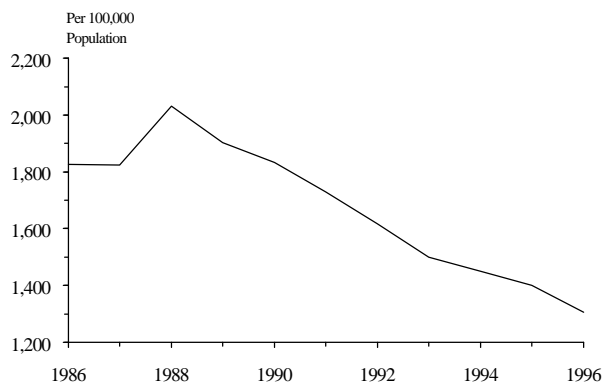
The crime situation in Singapore has been improving every year since 1988 (Chart 3). This is due to better police enforcement and greater community awareness and involvement in crime prevention. The number of seizable offences reported declined from a peak of 2,032 per 100,000 population in 1988 to 1,305 per 100,000 in 1996, the lowest in the decade.

CHART 2 PROPERTY CRIME RATE, 1994



Source: Fifth UN Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems

CHART 3 OVERALL CRIME RATE IN SINGAPORE, 1986-1996



Decline in Crime Rates of Major Offences

The incidence of most types of crimes declined during 1986-1996 (Table 2). The decline was most significant for violent crimes, namely robbery and murder. In 1986, 61 robberies were reported for every 100,000 population. By 1996, the robbery rate fell to 21 per 100,000. Similarly, the rate for murder

declined from 2.4 to 0.9 per 100,000.

Compared with 1986, the incidence of non-violent crimes such as housebreaking, cheating and thefts were also lower in 1996. The crime rate for housebreaking fell by half, from 110 in 1986 to 48 per 100,000 in 1996 while those for cheating and thefts declined by 35 and 24 per cent respectively.

TABLE 2 CRIME RATES OF MAJOR OFFENCES, 1986 & 1996

Seizable Offence	Per 100,000 Population		% Change 1986-1996
	1986	1996	
Total	1,827	1,305	-29
Thefts	921	704	-24
Cheating & related offences	101	66	-35
Housebreaking	110	48	-56
Outraging modesty	21	30	43
Robbery	61	21	-66
Rape*	1.2	0.7	-42
Murder	2.4	0.9	-63
Others	609	435	-29

* Refers to forcible rapes.

However, the number of molest cases increased between 1986 and 1996. From 21 per 100,000 in 1986, the number of molest cases rose to 30 per 100,000 in 1996. The rise in the number of reported molest could be due partly to the greater propensity of victims to report the crime.

The incidence of violent crimes is relatively low in Singapore. In 1996, murder, forcible rape and robbery jointly accounted for less than 2% of total reported offences.

JUVENILE CRIME TREND

Most Offences were Non-violent

Of the total 47,145 seizable offences reported in 1996, the majority of the reported crimes were non-violent offences such as housebreaking, theft and cheating (Chart 4). Theft was the most common offence, accounting for 54% of total reported offences. Of the total theft offences, motor vehicle thefts constituted 9.7%.

Rising Trend of Juvenile Crimes

During the last decade, there has been a rise in juvenile delinquency in Singapore. Between 1986 and 1996, the juvenile delinquency rate rose by almost 50% from 367 to 538 per 100,000 (Chart 5). It is significant that the rise in juvenile delinquency had been somewhat arrested in 1996; the rate had declined last year compared with the peak of 680 in 1995.

CHART 4 DISTRIBUTION OF MAJOR OFFENCES, 1996

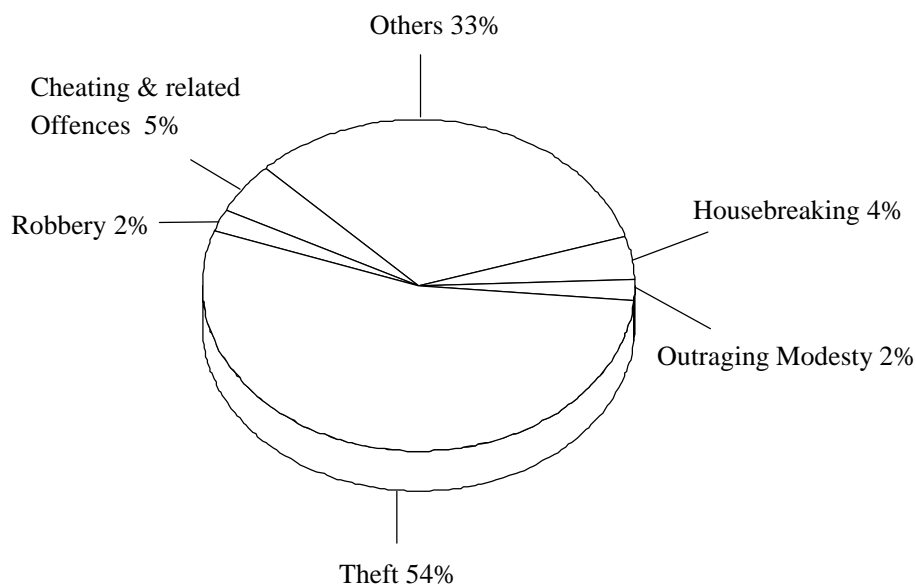
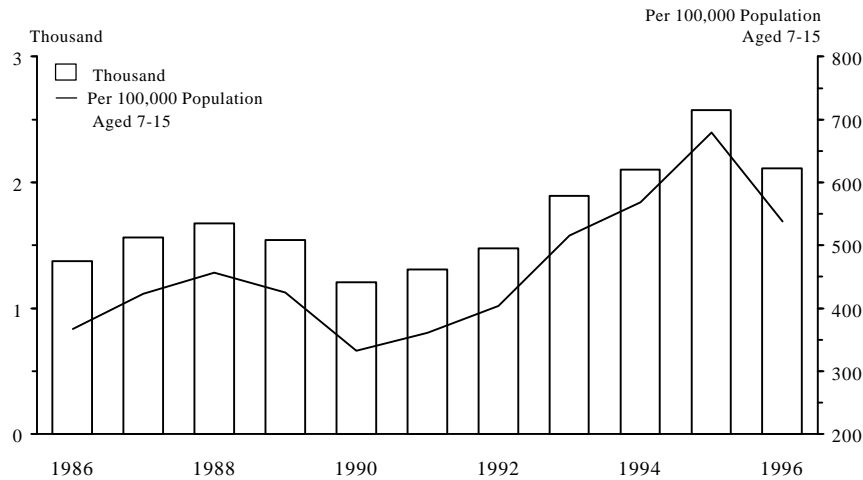


CHART 5 JUVENILE OFFENDERS, 1986-1996

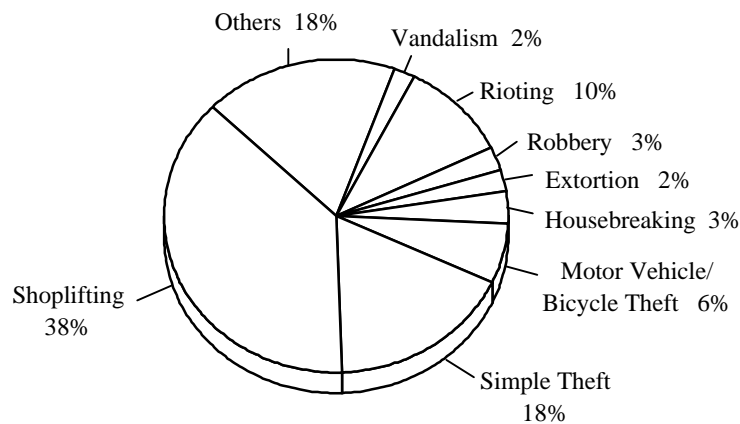


Notwithstanding the increase in recent years, the prevalence of juvenile delinquency in Singapore is low by international standards. Compared with the rate in Japan (1,220 per 100,000) and the United States (5,460 per 100,000) in 1993, the corresponding rate for Singapore was a lower 515 per 100,000.

Juvenile Offences

Most of the juveniles were arrested for petty crimes such as theft (Chart 6). About 38% of the juveniles were arrested for shoplifting while another 18% were caught for simple theft. More serious crimes, namely rioting, robbery and extortion accounted for 15%.

CHART 6 TYPE OF JUVENILE OFFENCES, 1996

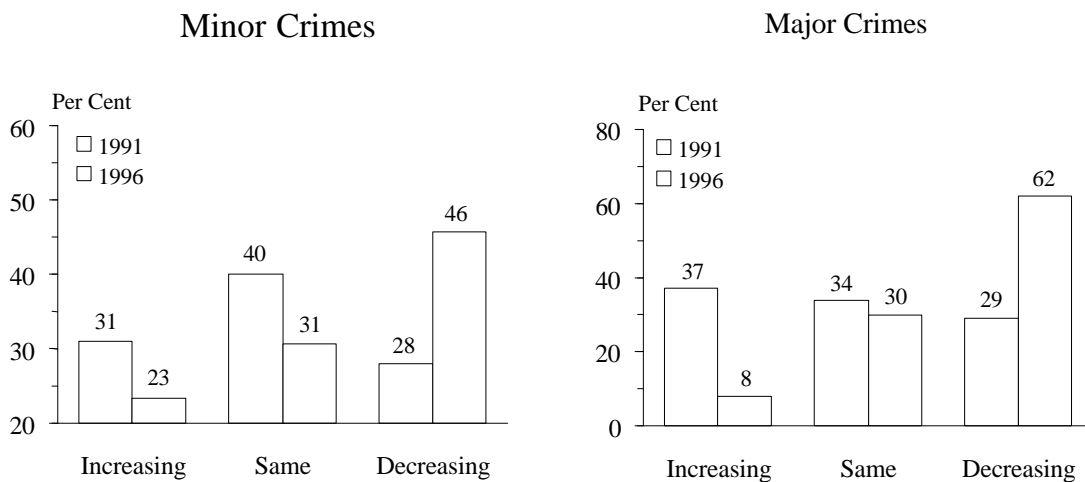


SINGAPOREANS' PERCEPTION ON PUBLIC SAFETY & SECURITY

In a 1996 survey, 62% of Singaporeans perceived that crime rate for major offences had decreased compared with the corresponding proportion of 29% in 1991 (Chart 7). Similarly, those who perceived decline in crime rate for minor offences rose from 28% in 1991 to 46% in 1996. These findings were in line with the crime trend as shown by the quantitative data for the last ten years.

The public's perceptions towards public safety and security in Singapore were generally favourable. Almost all (98%) of those surveyed in 1996 felt secure in Singapore. About 93% perceived Singapore to be safer than most other countries compared with 80% in 1991. More Singaporeans (86%) in 1996 also felt that general security in Singapore had improved over the last 5 years compared with 75% in 1991.

CHART 7 SINGAPOREANS' PERCEPTION OF CRIME RATES FOR MAJOR AND MINOR CRIMES, 1991 & 1996



CONCLUDING REMARKS

Singapore is relatively crime-free compared with the developed western countries. The crime situation here is on par with Asian countries like Japan and Hong Kong. The majority of Singaporeans viewed Singapore as safer than most other countries. They perceived a greater sense of general security over the last five years.

While juvenile delinquency has become more prevalent in recent years, a number of programmes have been successful in preventing further increase in crimes by juveniles. These include the establishment of boys' clubs and the introduction of family conferencing in the Juvenile Justice process which requires young offenders to face up to their crimes in front of their family, victims and teachers.