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Crime in New Zealand: a statistical profile

Executive summary

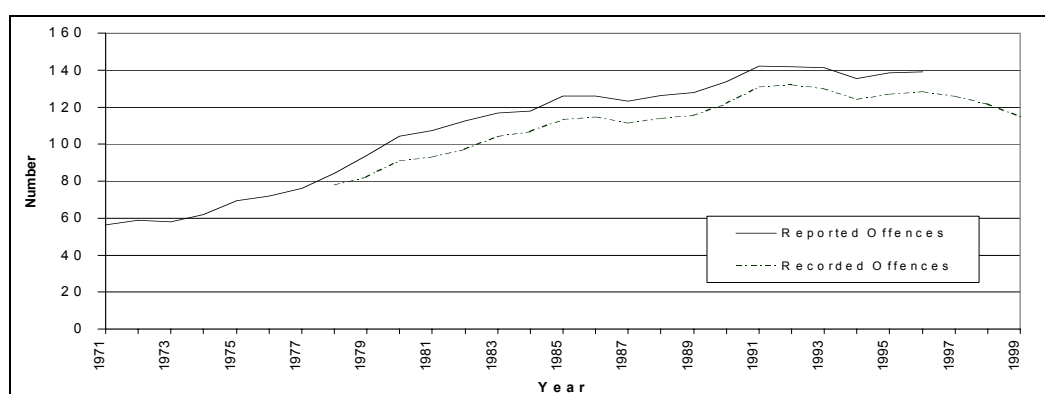
- After steadily rising for much of the period from the 1970s to the early 1990s, the number of criminal offences appears to have levelled out.
- Dishonesty offences make up the bulk of all recorded offences.
- According to research carried out in 1996, 14.2 percent of those surveyed were the victims of two or more crimes during 1995.
- The police district of Bay of Plenty has the highest rate of recorded offences (144.0 per 1,000 population), while North Shore/Waitakere has the lowest (86.7 per 1,000 population).
- Currently, those aged 14 to 20 years contribute around 40 percent of total offenders, down from 46 percent in 1988.
- Sworn police numbers peaked at 188 per 100,000 in 1994. Since then their numbers have been relatively stable, with a slight drop visible.
- New Zealand has a re-imprisonment rate of 37 – 39 percent, and a reconviction rate of 80 percent over 24 months.

Trends in offences

After rising steadily for much of the period from the 1970s to the early 1990s, the number of criminal offences appears to have levelled out (Figure 1).

Over the last twenty years the number of **reported offences** per 1,000 population increased from 56.3 in 1971 to a high of 142.2 in 1991, before falling slightly to 139 in 1996. In 1996 the reported offence series was replaced by the **recorded offence** series, which excludes 'no offence' events where the police decide after investigation that the alleged offence has not occurred. This series has been backdated to 1978.

Figure 1: Reported & recorded offences per 1,000 population, December years 1971 – 1999



Note: These figures exclude traffic offences.

Source: Police Statistics, New Zealand Police National Headquarters.

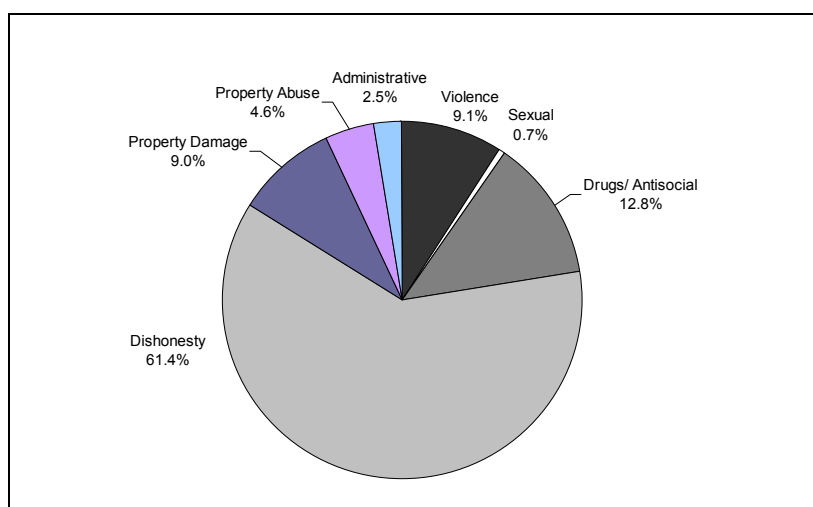
The total rate of **recorded offences** per 1,000 population increased from 78.1 population in 1978 to a high of 132.2 in 1992. The rate for the year to December 1999 is lower, at 114.9.

Crime categories

There are seven major categories of crime reported on by Police National Headquarters (Figure 2):

- **Violent offences**
homicide, grievous assaults, minor assaults, group assemblies, robbery, kidnapping/abduction, serious assaults, and intimidation/threats.
- **Sexual offences**
sexual attacks, abnormal sex, sexual affronts, immoral behaviour/miscellaneous, and offences relating to indecent videos.
- **Drugs/antisocial offences**
drugs, gaming, liquor offences, family offences, disorder, and vagrancy offences.
- **Dishonesty offences**
theft, fraud, car conversion, receiving, and burglary.
- **Property damage offences**
destruction of property, and endangering.
- **Property abuse offences**
firearms offences, littering, post/rail/fire abuses, animal cruelty, and trespass.
- **Administrative crime**
offences against justice, against national interest, births, deaths & marriage offences, offences regarding immigration and the Race Relations Act.

Figure 2: Recorded offence categories as a percentage of total offences, year to December 1999



Source: Police Statistics, New Zealand Police National Headquarters.

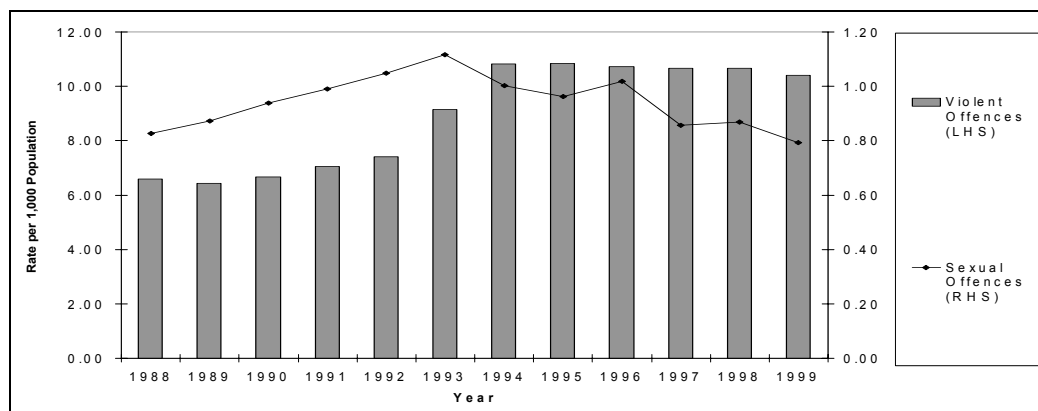
Dishonesty offences make up the bulk of all recorded offences; 70 percent of all recorded offences in 1988, and 61 percent in 1999. There were 79.5 recorded crimes of dishonesty per 1,000 population in 1988, rising to 95.8 per 1,000 in 1992. The latest rate is 70.6 per 1,000 population, which refers to a December 1999 year figure of 269,075.

Recorded violent offences per 1,000 population have increased by 58 percent in the eleven years from December 1988 to December 1999. There were 6.6 violent offences recorded per 1,000 population in 1988,

rising to a peak in 1995 of 10.9 offences per 1,000. Currently (December 1999), the rate stands at 10.4 per 1,000, or approximately 39,700 violent offences (Figure 3).

Recorded sexual offences per 1,000 population have decreased by 4 percent over the same period. There were 0.8 sexual offences per 1,000 recorded in 1988, rising to a peak of 1.1 in 1993 (December years), with a current rate of 0.8 relating to 3,026 sexual offences for 1999.

Figure 3: Number of violent and sexual offences per 1,000 population, December years 1988 – 1999



Source: Police Statistics, New Zealand Police National Headquarters.

International comparison

Internationally, in population-adjusted terms, New Zealand experiences high rates of recorded crime (Table 1). However, care is required when comparing crime statistics from different countries due to differences in legal systems and statistical recording methods.

Table 1: Specific crime categories recorded by police 1997^{1,2}

Country/State	Rate per 100,000 population			
	Homicide	Violent crime	Domestic burglary	Motor vehicle theft
New Zealand	2.4	1122	1313	819
Canada	1.9	989	779	591
Australia	1.9	867	1539	704
England & Wales	1.4	665	995	780
United States	7.3	628	934	521
Northern Ireland	2.5	491	443	514
France	1.6	323	364	712
Germany	1.4	227	222	232
Italy	1.6	113	413	524
Japan	1.0	32	176	552

Notes: 1. Definitions of offences vary among countries due to differences in both legal systems and statistical recording methods; comparisons may be affected by these differences.

2. The rates for the United States are for 1996.

Definitions: Homicide. Intentional killing of a person excluding attempts: murder, manslaughter, (excluding death by dangerous driving), euthanasia and infanticide; excluding abortion and help with suicide.

Violent Crime. Violence against the person, robbery and sexual offences. For Australia, includes violence against the person, aggravated assault and sexual offences only.

Domestic Burglary. Gaining access to a dwelling by the use of force to steal goods.

Motor Vehicle Theft. All land vehicles with an engine which run on the road and are used to carry people (including cars, motor cycles, buses, lorries, agricultural vehicles, etc). For New Zealand, excludes motor cycles.

Sources: Home Office, *Criminal Statistics England and Wales 1997*; U.N. *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics*, December 1999; Office of National Statistics (UK) *Monthly Digest of Statistics*, February 2000.

Victims of crime

According to the New Zealand National Survey of Crime Victims undertaken in 1996, an estimated two million offences against households and individuals took place during 1995. Of the cases the survey was able to collect information on, only 40 percent were reported to the police. The offences were unevenly distributed among the survey respondents, with some experiencing repeat victimisation. While 67.6 percent of the sample were not subject to criminal activity, 14.2 percent suffered from two or more criminal offences, and 4 percent had been the victim of five or more criminal activities.

The community-based organisation 'Victim Support' reported in their 1998 Annual Report that 84 percent (approximately 183,380) of their clients were victims of criminal activity during the 1998 year, with the remaining 16 percent being victims of accident and emergency events.

Police districts

Recorded offences per population have fallen nationally over the last year to December 1999 (-5.9%), but the opposite has occurred within the police districts of Northland (+4.1%) and Tasman (+7.2%) (Table 2).

Table 2: Recorded offences by police district per 1,000 population

District	Dec-97	Dec-98	Dec-99	% change (December)	
				1997 - 1998	1998 - 1999
Northland	110.7	110.0	114.5	-0.6%	4.1%
Auckland City	161.6	153.1	138.0	-5.3%	-9.9%
North Shore/Waitakere	95.1	90.4	86.7	-4.9%	-4.1%
Counties/Manukau	140.1	136.7	133.6	-2.4%	-2.3%
Waikato	122.4	116.9	105.5	-4.5%	-9.8%
Bay of Plenty	159.4	157.4	144.0	-1.3%	-8.5%
Eastern	149.2	144.1	124.3	-3.4%	-13.7%
Central	135.3	128.0	121.2	-5.4%	-5.3%
Wellington	113.5	103.9	100.5	-8.5%	-3.3%
Tasman	105.5	94.5	101.3	-10.5%	7.2%
Canterbury	113.2	115.8	107.7	2.3%	-7.0%
Southern	116.6	118.7	111.7	1.8%	-5.9%
Total	125.9	121.8	114.5	-3.3%	-5.9%

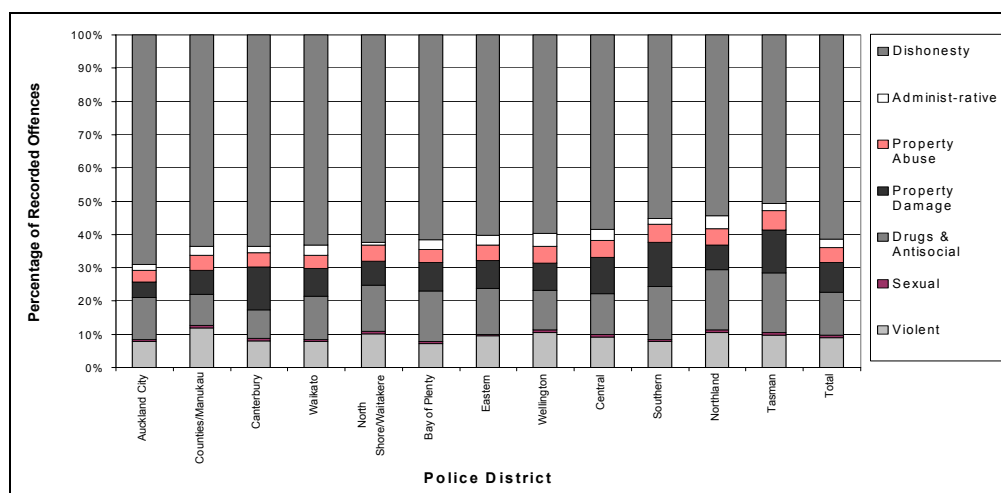
Note: 1997 – 1998 Mean December year, 1998 provisional. 1999 as at 31 December estimate.

Source: Police Statistics, New Zealand Police National Headquarters.

Each police district experienced a different pattern of recorded crime (Figure 4). Table three details recorded offences by categories and police district per 1,000 population.

While dishonesty offences made up 69 percent of recorded crime within the Auckland City police district for the year ending December 1999, the proportion of recorded crime for this offence type within the Tasman police district was 51 percent.

Figure 4: Percentage of recorded offences by category and police district, year ending December 1999



Source: Police Statistics, New Zealand Police National Headquarters.

Table 3: Recorded categories of offences per 1,000 population by police district, Year ending December 1999

District	Violent	Sexual	Drugs & Antisocial	Dishonesty	Property Damage	Property Abuse	Administrative	Total
Northland	12.1	0.9	20.7	62.2	8.6	5.5	4.6	114.5
Auckland City	10.7	0.7	17.6	95.2	6.4	4.9	2.5	138.0
North Shore/Waitakere	8.8	0.7	12.0	54.1	6.3	4.2	0.6	86.7
Counties/Manukau	15.9	1.0	12.6	85.0	9.5	6.1	3.5	133.6
Waikato	8.1	0.8	13.7	66.5	8.9	4.2	3.3	105.5
Bay of Plenty	10.5	0.8	22.0	88.8	12.1	5.8	4.0	144.0
Eastern	11.9	0.6	17.2	74.9	10.2	5.9	3.7	124.3
Central	11.1	1.0	14.7	70.7	13.2	6.3	4.1	121.2
Wellington	10.6	0.8	11.8	60.0	8.2	5.1	3.9	100.5
Tasman	9.9	0.7	18.1	51.4	13.1	5.9	2.2	101.3
Canterbury	8.6	0.8	9.2	68.5	14.0	4.6	2.0	107.7
Southern	8.7	0.7	17.9	61.7	14.7	6.1	1.9	111.7
Total	10.4	0.8	14.7	70.3	10.3	5.2	2.9	114.5

Note: 1999 population figures are as at 31 December 1999 estimates.

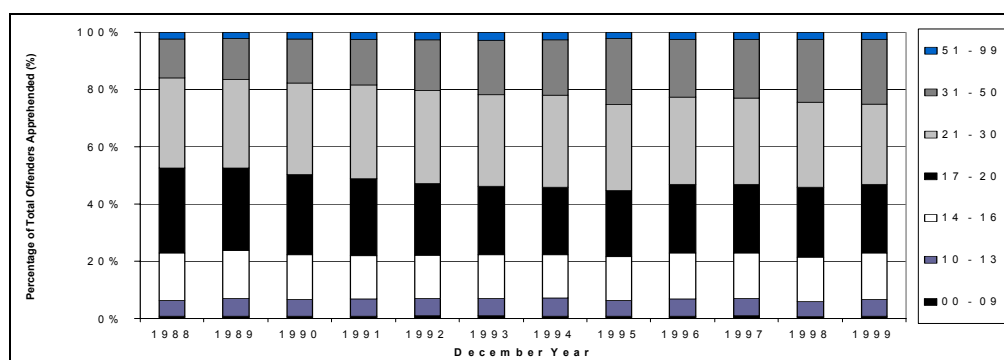
Source: Police Statistics, New Zealand Police National Headquarters.

Offender types

Offenders are more likely to be in the 21 to 30 year age group, an age group which has accounted for about a third of all offenders over the past twelve years. Their share of offenders apprehended was 28.1 percent for the December 1999 year. The age group with the greatest increase over the last eleven years is the 31 to 50 year age group (from 13.7% to 22.6%), with offender numbers increasing from 19,652 in 1988 to 42,629 in 1999. This increase was the result of faster than average growth in the offending rate for this age group, as well as an increasing share of the total population (Figure 5).

The age group with the greatest decline over the past eleven years is the 17 to 20 year age group, down from 29.7 to 23.9 percent in 1999. In 1999, those aged between 14 and 20 years (the 14 – 16 and 17 – 20 age groups combined) comprised about 40 percent of total offenders, which was down from 46 percent in 1988. This age group did have an increase in offender rates but has a declining share of the population.

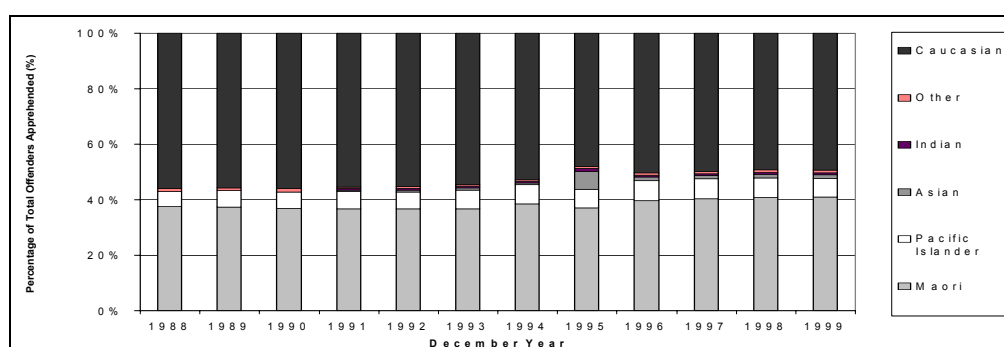
**Figure 5: Percentage of total offenders by age group
December years 1988 – 1999**



Source: Police Statistics, New Zealand Police National Headquarters.

The percentage of offenders who are classified as Caucasian has decreased from 56 percent in 1988 to 49 percent in 1999 (December years) (Figure 6). Maori now account for a slightly higher percentage of all offenders, at 41 percent in 1999, up from 38 percent in 1988.

**Figure 6: Percentage of total offenders by ethnicity
December years 1988 – 1999**



Source: Police Statistics, New Zealand Police National Headquarters.

Changes in the percentage of offenders by ethnicity are influenced by the different population growth rates of the ethnic groups. For example, the increase in the percentage of offenders who are Maori or Pacific Islander is partly because these groups make up an increasing proportion of the population. However, all ethnic groups apart have also had an increase in their offending rate, as shown by Table 4.

Table 4: Offender apprehensions rates per 100,000 ethnic population

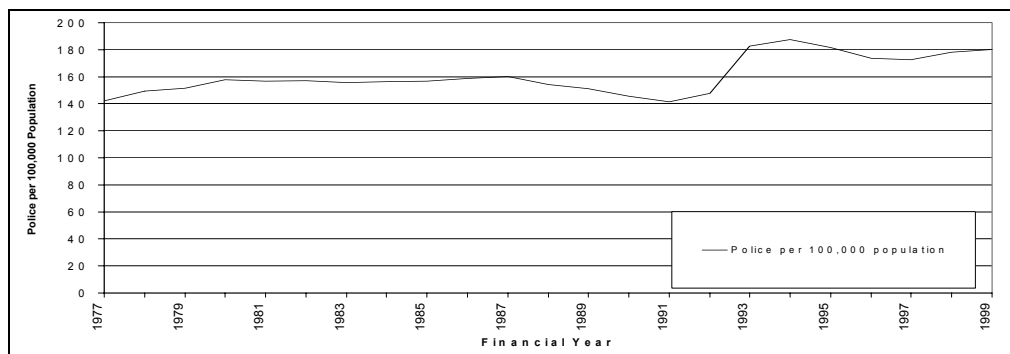
Ethnicity	Rate per 100,000 Ethnic Population			Change	
	1986	1991	1996	1986 - 91	1991 - 96
European	2,926	3,091	3,785	5.6%	22.4%
NZ Maori	13,589	12,519	14,752	-7.9%	17.8%
Pacific Islander	5,210	6,001	8,280	15.2%	38.0%
Asian	..	910	1,426	..	56.7%
Total	4,280	4,393	5,390	2.6%	22.7%

Sources: Statistics New Zealand, Census data; New Zealand Police National Headquarters.

Police numbers

The number of sworn police (headcount) in relation to New Zealand's population has increased from 1977 to 1980 (Figure 7). The marked rise in the graph during the 1992/93 financial year was due to the police taking over the staff and functions of the Traffic Safety Service. The rate of sworn police numbers per population peaked at 188 police per 100,000 in 1994. Since then it has remained relatively stable, with a slight drop visible.

**Figure 7: Sworn police headcount numbers per 100,000 population
Financial years 1977 – 1999**



Source: Police Statistics, New Zealand Police National Headquarters.

Note: The large rise in 1992 was due to the Police taking over the functions of the Traffic Safety Service.

Re-offending

Re-offending is a major contributor to the size of our prison populations. Our re-imprisonment rate of 37 to 39 percent is comparable with Canada's 38 percent, lower than Scotland's 45 percent, and higher than Australia's 30 percent, and England/Wales at 26 percent.

Offenders released from prison in New Zealand have an 80 percent re-conviction rate within 24 months. This rate is very high compared with Australia (37%), Canada (57%), England/Wales (56%), and Scotland (69%).

Crime bulletin

To keep you informed on the latest data concerning crime within New Zealand, the Parliamentary Library will be publishing a 'Crime' statistical bulletin twice a year. Attached is the first edition in the series.

Selected references

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