

Crime in Regional and Rural NSW in 2023: Trends and Patterns

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SUMMARY

Rates of violent and property crime are considerably higher in Regional NSW than in Sydney. This is a longstanding feature of crime in NSW and has persisted despite long-term declines in property crime over the past two decades and changing patterns of violent crime. The scale of the disparity between the rate of crime in Greater Sydney and the Rest of NSW increased in the 10 years to 2023 due to less favourable crime trends in the regions compared with Sydney. This paper considers recorded crime in Regional NSW to December 2023 focusing on how long-term and short-term crime trends in Regional NSW compare with Sydney, the extent to which crime is higher in Regional NSW compared with Sydney, and who appears to be responsible.

Key findings:

- In the two decades to 2023, property crime fell significantly in Regional NSW (down 48% from 2004 to 2023). However, the reduction in Regional NSW was less than the reduction in Greater Sydney (down 67% over the same period). Due to the different rates of decline, in 2023 the rate of recorded property crime was 59% higher in Regional NSW compared to Greater Sydney.
- In 2023 the aggregate rate of recorded violent crime in Regional NSW was equivalent to the recorded rate in 2004. In Greater Sydney, however, violent crime declined significantly in the two decades to 2023 (down 20% from 2004 to 2023). The long-term decline in violence in Sydney and relative stability in Regional NSW has increased the disparity between the rate of violent crime in the regions versus the capital city. In 2023 the rate of recorded violent crime was 57% higher in Regional NSW compared with Greater Sydney.
- During the COVID pandemic (2020 and 2021) crime fell across most offence categories in Regional NSW (and in Sydney). In Regional NSW in 2023 most major offences remained lower than in 2019 (prior to the pandemic). This is true of: break and enter dwelling, break and enter non-dwelling, steal from motor vehicle, steal from dwelling, steal from person, other theft, sexual touching, and robbery. Four major offences, however, significantly increased in Regional NSW over the five years from 2019 to 2023:
 - o Motor vehicle theft (up 20% or 1,239 additional incidents)
 - o Non-domestic assault (up 14% or 1,825 additional incidents)
 - o Sexual assault (up 47% or 1,505 additional incidents)
 - o Domestic violence related assault (up 24% or 3,284 additional incidents)

KEYWORDS

Crime statistics

regional crime

violent crime

property crime

- The 20% increase in motor vehicle theft from 2019 to 2023 in Regional NSW appears to be due to an increase in offending by young people; legal actions for this group increased by 188% from 2019 to 2023. Police data also shows an increase in vehicle theft incidents co-occurring with break-ins and an increase in keys being stolen in break-ins.
- The 47% increase in sexual assault reports from 2019 to 2023 in Regional NSW is mostly due to a rise in incidents involving adult victims (aged 16+) (50% of the increase), followed by an increase in historic child sexual assault (35% of the increase) and a smaller increase in contemporary child sexual assault reports (15% of the increase). The 13% rise in sexual assault legal actions from 2019 to 2023 in Regional NSW are entirely concentrated among adult males.
- The 24% increase in reports of domestic violence related assault is due to an increase in reported family violence (49% of the increase) and an increase in intimate partner assaults (37% of the increase). Domestic violence assault legal actions increased by 19% from 2019 to 2023 in Regional NSW largely due to an increase in legal actions against adult women (51% of the increase), adult men (30% of the increase) and girls (13% of the increase).
- The 14% increase in non-domestic assault from 2019 to 2023 in Regional NSW is due to an increase in incidents occurring on residential premises (40% of the increase) and on school premises (31% of the increase). Legal actions against young people account for 62% of the total increase in legal actions for this offence in Regional NSW.

INTRODUCTION

A longstanding feature of crime in NSW is that regional, rural, and remote locations tend to experience higher rates of crime than does the capital city of Sydney. The discrepancy between crime rates in the city and the country persist to the present day despite crime variously increasing and falling over the past two decades. In fact, because crime trends have tended to be less favourable in the regions compared with Sydney (declining less or increasing more) the differential in the rate of crime between Greater Sydney and the Rest of NSW has increased in the last 10 years.

This paper explores crime patterns in Regional NSW up to December 2023 with a focus on:

- Long-term and short-term crime trends in Regional NSW, and how these compare with Sydney
- The extent to which crime is higher in Regional NSW compared with Sydney
- Characteristics of people who commit crimes in Regional NSW

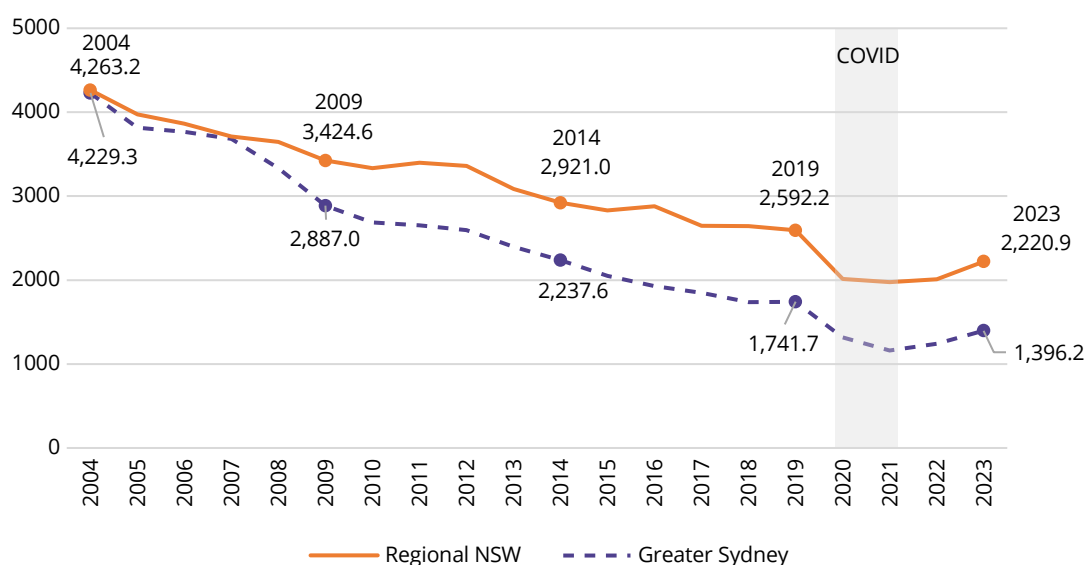
This study relies on recorded crime statistics which reflect criminal incidents reported to or detected by the NSW Police Force (NSWPF). Patterns are considered in the broad offence categories of violent crime¹ and property crime² and across various specific major offence types.

The term 'Regional NSW' is used to refer to parts of NSW outside Greater Sydney. For the purpose of this report 'Regional NSW' includes remote communities, small and large regional towns and also the centre and surrounds of the cities of Wollongong and Newcastle. In 2021 35% of the NSW population resided in Regional NSW and 65% resided in Greater Sydney. The Local Government Areas Central Coast, Blue Mountains and Wollondilly are considered in Greater Sydney.

Property crime and Violent crime patterns in Regional NSW and Greater Sydney

At the NSW level the reported rate of both violent crime and property crime have declined over the 20 years to 2023. Figures 1 and 2 show the aggregate rate of violent crime and property crime from 2004 to 2023 with a split for Regional NSW and Greater Sydney. In 2020 and 2021 the COVID 19 pandemic caused an additional decline in property crime and the two NSW COVID lockdowns are indicated on the charts.

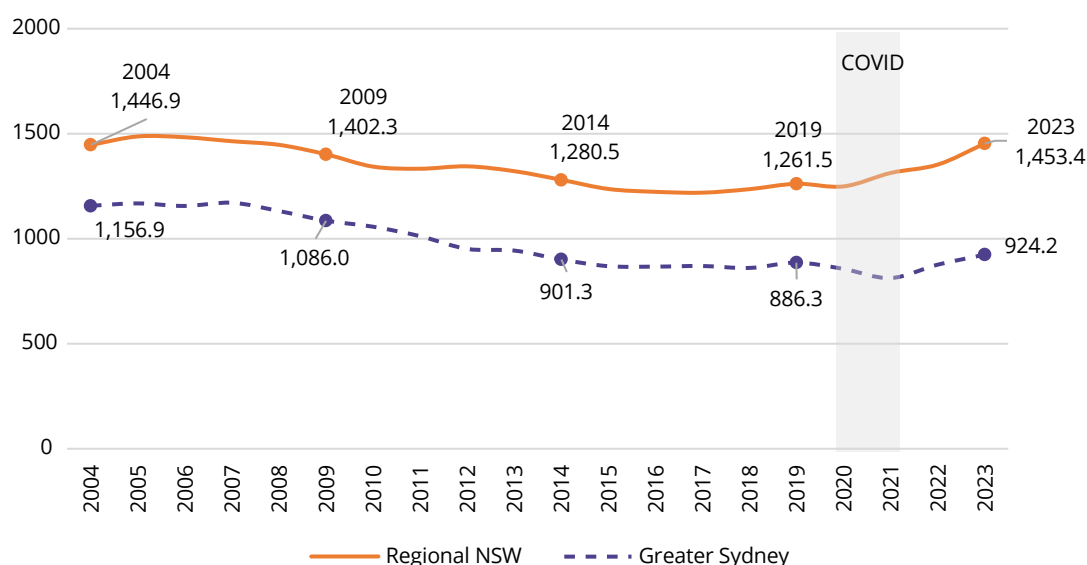
Figure 1. Rate per 100,000 of property crime incidents by region: 2004 to 2023



¹ Violent offences include murder, attempted murder, manslaughter, assault - domestic violence related, assault - non-domestic violence related, assault police, robbery without a weapon, robbery with a firearm, robbery with a weapon not a firearm, sexual assault and sexual touching, sexual act and other sexual offences.

² Property offences include break and enter dwelling, break and enter non-dwelling, motor vehicle theft, steal from motor vehicle, steal from retail store, steal from dwelling, steal from person, stock theft and other theft.

Figure 2. Rate per 100,000 of violent crime incidents by region: 2004 to 2023



Property crime - trends and rates

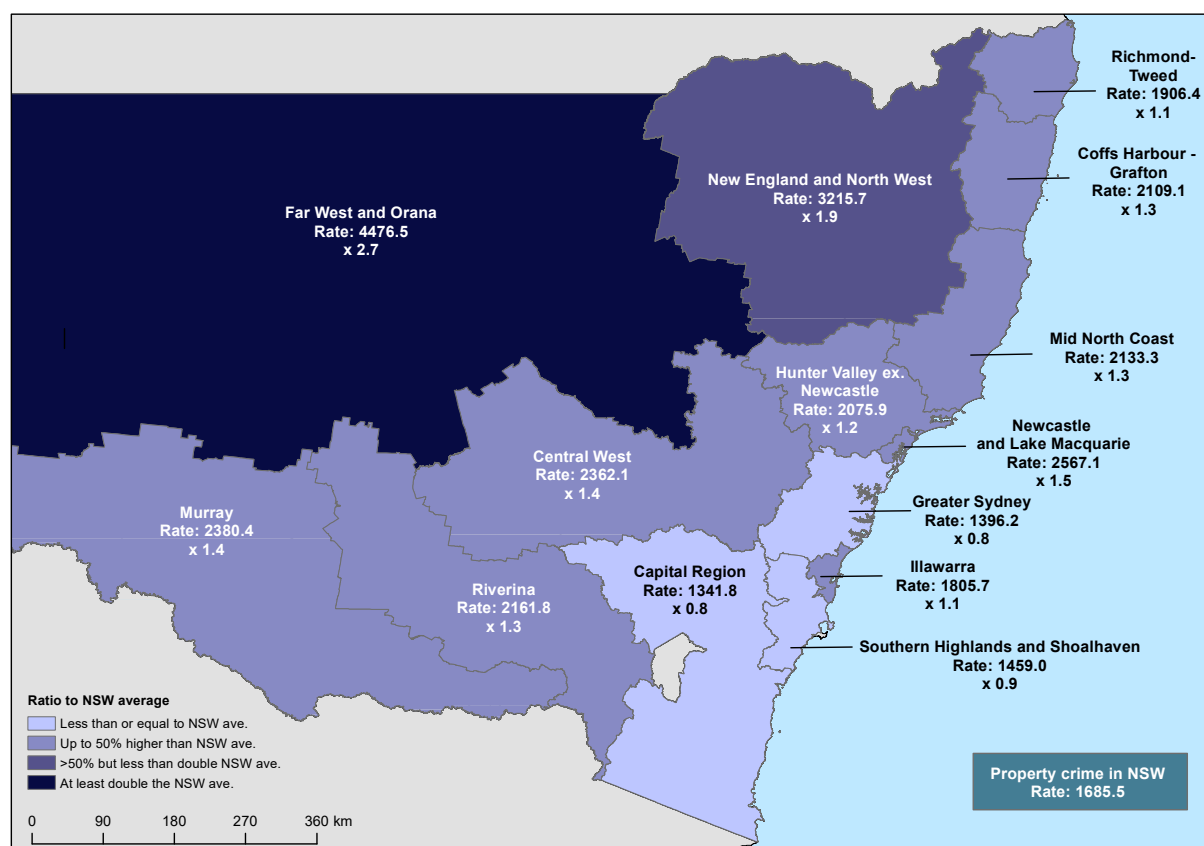
Figure 1 shows Greater Sydney and Regional NSW both experienced large falls in recorded theft offences over the 20 years to 2023. As a result, the property crime rate in both locations was at a near-record low in 2023. In both locations crime was lowest in the pandemic year of 2021 and increased slightly in the two years following. It is also apparent from the chart that the long-term decline has been larger in Greater Sydney than in Regional NSW. In 2004, the average rate of property crime in Regional NSW was equivalent to the rate in Sydney; however, by 2023 the Sydney property crime rate was considerably lower than in Regional NSW. Table 1 presents the five-, ten-, fifteen- and 20-year percentage change in the rate of recorded property crime and violent crime. In the 20 years to 2023 the rate of property crime fell by 67% in Greater Sydney compared to 48% in Regional NSW. Table 1 shows that across each time-period the decline in property crime was greater in Sydney than in Regional NSW. Due to the different rates of decline, in 2023 the rate of property crime in Regional NSW was 59% higher than in Sydney.

Table 1. Percentage change in the rate of recorded property crime and violent crime

Offence	Region	20-year trends (2004 to 2023)	15-year trends (2009 to 2023)	10-year trends (2014 to 2023)	5-year trends (2019 to 2023)
Property crime	Regional NSW	-47.9%	-35.1%	-24.0%	-14.3%
	Greater Sydney	-67.0%	-51.6%	-37.6%	-19.8%
	NSW total	-60.5%	-45.3%	-32.1%	-17.1%
Violent Crime	Regional NSW	0.4%	3.7%	13.5%	15.2%
	Greater Sydney	-20.1%	-14.9%	2.5%	4.3%
	NSW total	-12.2%	-6.8%	7.9%	9.2%

The relative rates of property crime in 2023 across NSW are shown in the map at Figure 3. Of the 14 Statistical Areas in NSW, 11 had property crime rates above the NSW average; all of these 11 locations were in Regional NSW. Three Statistical Areas reported property crime rates below the NSW rate: Greater Sydney, Southern Highlands & Shoalhaven, and Capital Region. In Far West and Orana, rates of property crime in 2023 were almost three times the NSW average (see data in Appendix 1).

Figure 3. Rate of property crime in Regional NSW Statistical Areas and ratio to NSW



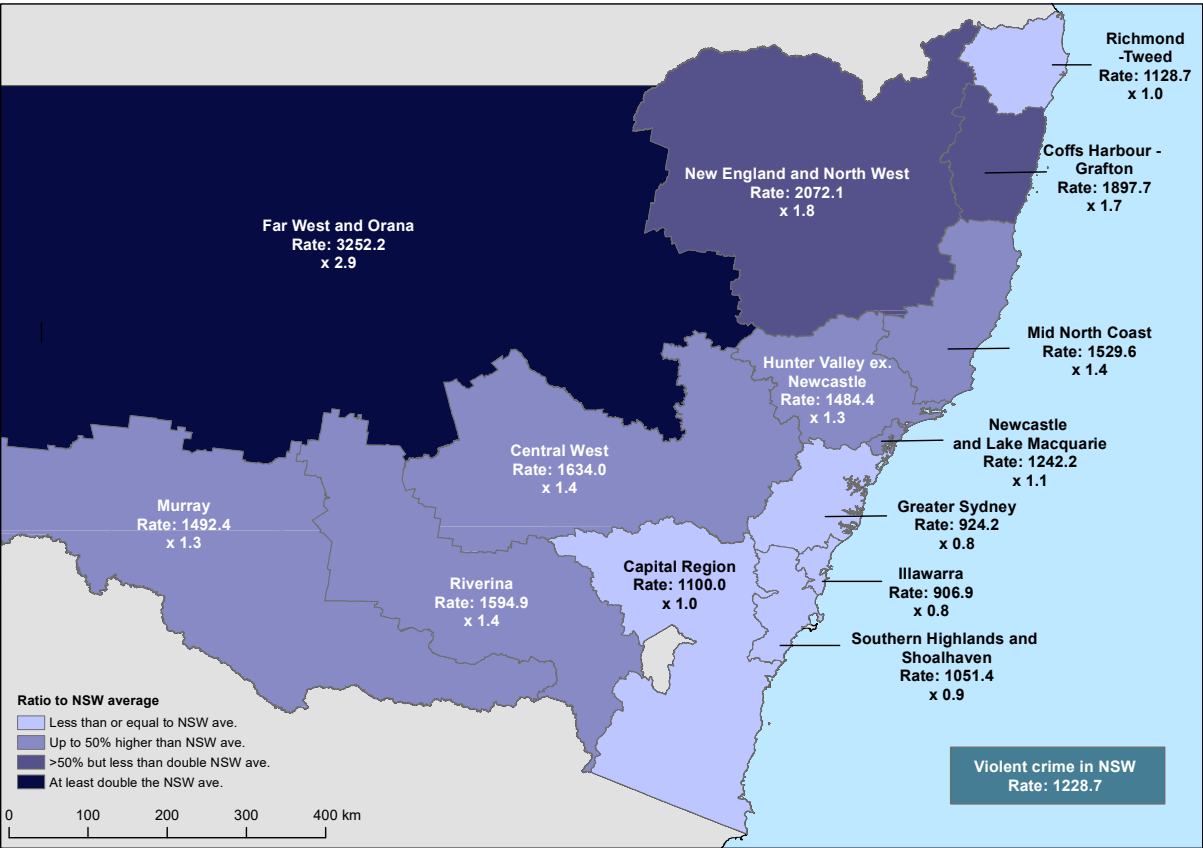
Violent crime – trends and rates

This category is dominated by domestic violence related assault and non-domestic violence related assault but also includes sexual offences and robbery. While the rate of violent crime fell in NSW from 2004 to 2023, Figure 2 shows that this decline was largely driven by a fall in Greater Sydney. In Sydney the rate of reported violent crime incidents fell 20% from 2004 to 2023. In Regional NSW, the recorded rate of violent incidents in 2004 was comparable to 2023. Figure 2 suggests that Regional NSW experienced a period of declining violence from 2005 to 2017, after which violent crime reports began to increase.

Figure 2 also shows that the rate of violent crime has been considerably higher in Regional NSW than in Sydney over the duration shown. However, the pronounced decline in violence in Sydney has meant that this difference has grown over time. In 2004, the rate of violent crime was 25% higher in Regional NSW compared with Sydney while by 2023 violent crime reports were 57% higher in Regional NSW than in Sydney. Table 1 shows trends over five-, ten-, fifteen- and 20-years in violent crime in both Regional NSW and Sydney. Over the most recent five years from 2019 to 2023, violent crime reports increased in both Regional NSW and Sydney; however the size of the increase in Regional NSW exceeded that of Sydney (up 15% and 4% respectively).

The map at Figure 4 shows the rate of violent crime across the 14 Statistical Areas in NSW in 2023. Nine Statistical Areas reported violent crime rates above the NSW average (all of which were in Regional NSW). Three Statistical Areas reported violent crime rates below the 2023 NSW rate: Greater Sydney, Illawarra, and Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven. Two Statistical Areas, Capital Region and Richmond-Tweed, had violent crime rates equivalent with the NSW average. In Far West and Orana, rates of violent crime were again almost three times the NSW average.

Figure 4. Rate of violent crime in Regional NSW Statistical Areas and ratio to NSW average: 2023



Characteristics of suspected offenders

Here we consider who Police commenced legal proceeding against for property and violent crime in Regional NSW and Sydney in 2023 to understand the demographics of people involved in criminal behaviour³. Note that legal actions are an imperfect reflection of people who offend as most crimes do not result in a legal action and the individuals who are legally proceeded against may not be representative of offenders generally. Factors such as policing, where offences occur (eg. in public) and an offender’s ability to avoid detection can all influence their legal action rate. Figures 5 and 6 show the age, gender, and Aboriginality of persons of interest proceeded against by NSW Police for violent and property offences in 2023 by location.

³ Legal actions include referral to court, caution, warning, or youth justice conference under the Young Offenders Act 1997, criminal infringement notice, other infringement notice and/or cannabis or other drug caution.

Figure 5. Age, gender, and Aboriginal status of persons of interest proceeded against for property crime by region: 2023

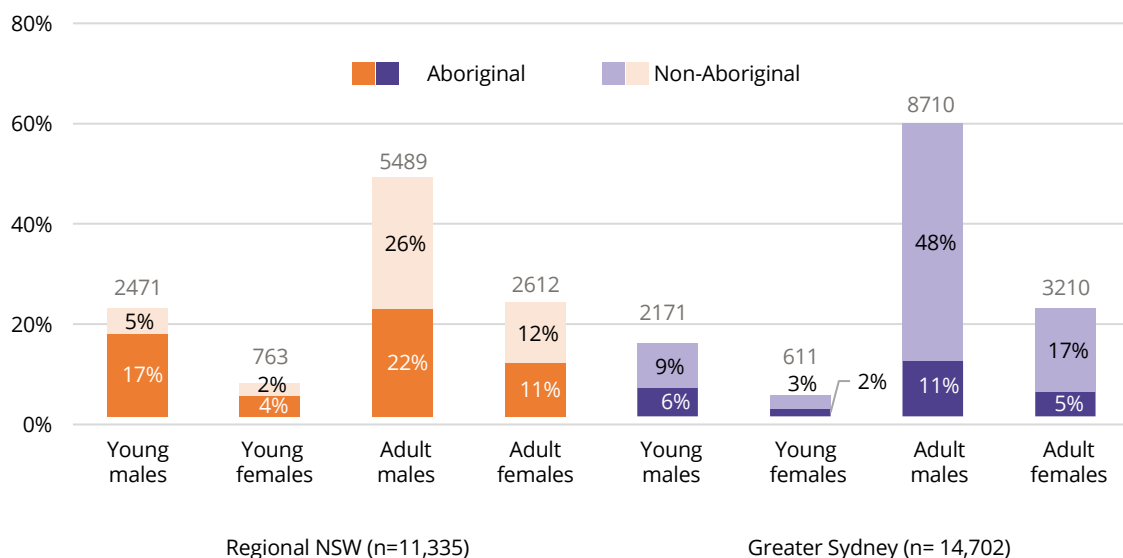
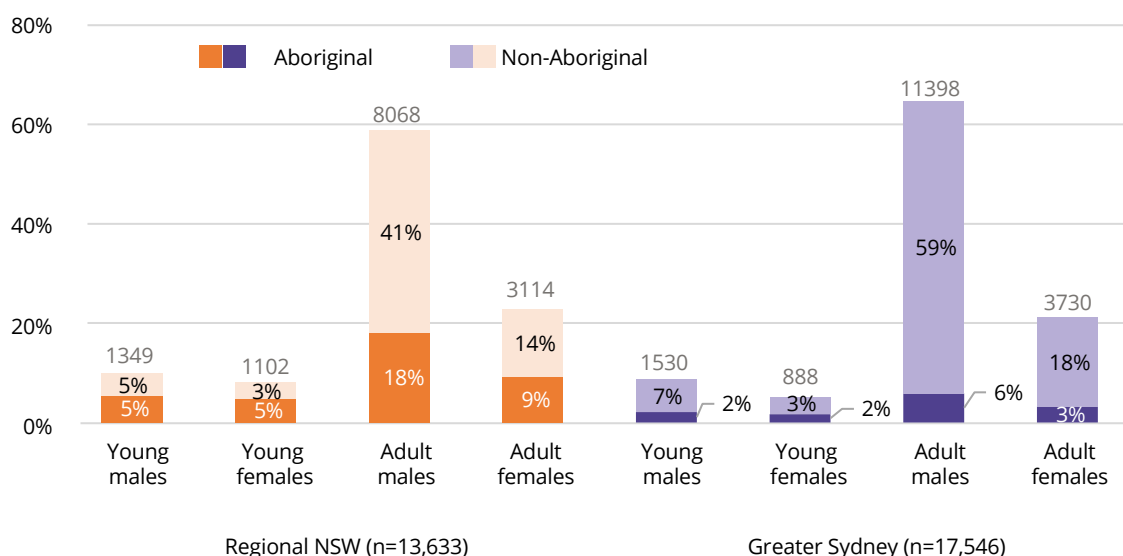


Figure 6. Age, gender, and Aboriginal status of persons of interest proceeded against for violent crime by region: 2023



In both Regional NSW and Greater Sydney, offenders proceeded against in 2023 were overwhelmingly male. For property crime, males made up 70% of offenders in the regions and 74% of offenders in Sydney. Adults accounted for 71% of people proceeded against for property crime in Regional NSW in 2023 compared with 81% in Sydney. In Regional NSW young people were the recipient of 28% of property crime legal actions in 2023 and young males specifically received 22% (equivalent figures for Sydney were 20% and 15% respectively). In Regional NSW over half (53%) of legal actions initiated by Police for property offending in 2023 involved an Aboriginal offender compared to 23% in Greater Sydney.

Legal actions for violent offences in 2023 were also predominantly directed towards males, and to a greater extent than property crime (81% in the regions and 86% in Sydney). Adults also accounted for a greater proportion of violent legal actions; 82% in Regional NSW and 86% in Sydney. Adult males received 59% of legal actions for violence in Regional NSW in 2023 and 65% in Sydney. With respect to Indigeneity, Aboriginal people were involved in 37% of legal actions for violent offences in the regions compared to 13% in Sydney.

Trends in property crimes by offence type

Above we saw that in aggregate property crime rates declined 48% in Regional NSW over the past two decades; and that, in 2023, the rate of property crime in Regional NSW was 59% higher than in Greater Sydney. Property crime comprises a range of theft offences such as break and enter, motor vehicle theft and other stealing offences. Here we look at patterns for these individual offences.

We are interested in both the long-term change over the past two decades, and more recent patterns in the five years from 2019 to 2023. Charts 7 to 12 show that all property crimes, with the exception of retail theft, have exhibited long term falls. While the declines in Regional NSW from 2004 to 2023 are more modest than in Sydney, they are still large. In Regional NSW the rate of break and enter dwelling in 2023 was 55% lower than in 2004, break and enter non-dwelling was 69% lower, motor vehicle theft was 35% lower, steal from motor vehicle was 38% lower, steal from dwelling was 56% lower, and steal from person was 74% lower. In contrast, the rate of recorded incidents of steal from retail store increased by 33% in Regional NSW from 2004 to 2023. The five-, ten-, fifteen- and 20-year percentage change in the rate of these property offences is presented in Appendix 2.

The offence specific charts show that, across the board, property crime was unusually low in 2020 and 2021 in line with the COVID 19 pandemic. It is, therefore, useful to compare 2023 crime rates with crime in 2019 to gauge how crime compares now with the period immediately preceding the pandemic.

All property crimes increased at least slightly in 2022 and 2023 from their COVID-low. For five of the seven property crimes shown the rate of recovery has been slow and the rate of crime recorded in Regional NSW in 2023 was still considerably lower than in 2019. In 2023 rates of residential break and enter in Regional NSW were 17% lower than five years prior in the pre-COVID year of 2019, rates of break and enter non-dwelling were 12% lower, rates of steal from motor vehicle were 16% lower, steal from dwelling was 27% lower, and steal from person was 27% lower. Rates of retail theft in 2023 were on par with 2019. The only property crime to have increased beyond 2019 rates in Regional NSW is motor vehicle theft; this is discussed in more detail below.

Appendix 3 shows the change in the number of recorded criminal incidents for 12 major offences between 2019 and 2023 in the 14 Statistical Areas in NSW. This allows us to observe local crime patterns which might not be consistent with the overarching pattern in Regional NSW. While most property crimes are down or stable in 2023 compared with five years earlier in 2019 Appendix 3 shows some locations going against this trend. Among property crimes there has been an increase in break and enter dwelling in New England & North West (up 13% from 2019 to 2023); break and enter non-dwelling increased in Far West and Orana (up 41%) and Richmond-Tweed (up 36%) and Retail theft increased in Richmond-Tweed (up 33%), Far West & Orana (up 15%) and Southern Highlands & Shoalhaven (up 22%). Motor vehicle theft increased in many regional locations and is discussed in more detail below.

Another feature of Charts 7 to 12 is we can see that the rate of crime is higher in Regional NSW compared with Sydney for each of these offences, again with the exception of retail theft. The scale of the difference for each offence in 2023 is shown in Chart 13; in 2023 break and enter non-dwelling was 171% higher in Regional NSW compared with Greater Sydney, break and enter dwelling was 127% higher, the motor vehicle theft rate was double the rate of Greater Sydney, and malicious damage to property and steal from motor vehicle were both more than 50% higher than the Sydney average. The smallest difference was in rates of retail theft which was 14% higher in Regional NSW than Greater Sydney.

Figure 7-12. Rate of property crime incidents per 100,000 population by region: 2004 to 2023

Figure 7. Break and enter dwelling

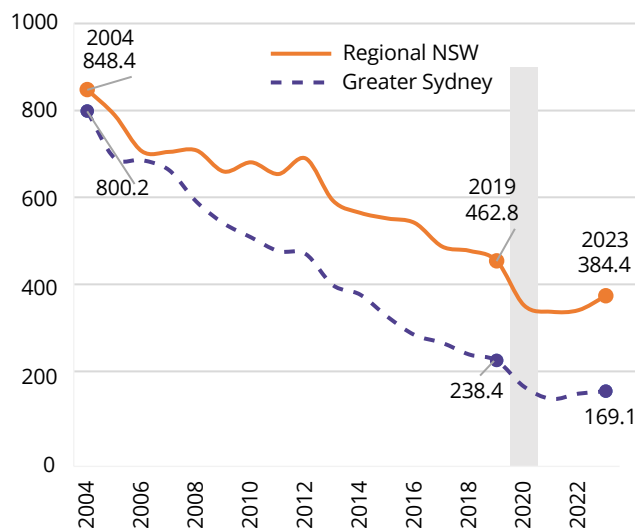


Figure 8. Break and enter non dwelling

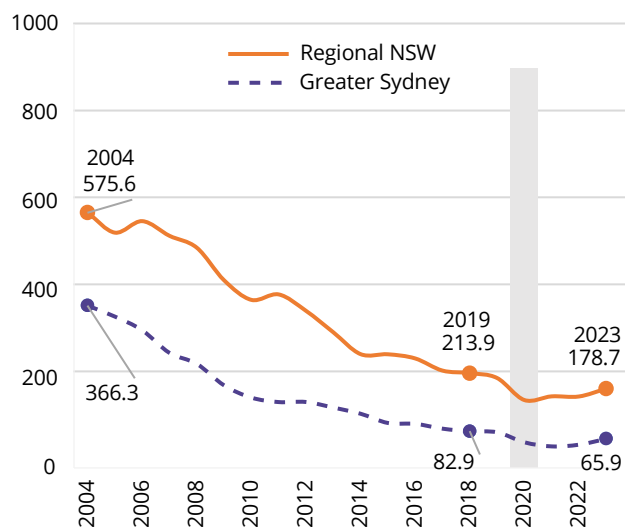


Figure 9. Motor vehicle theft

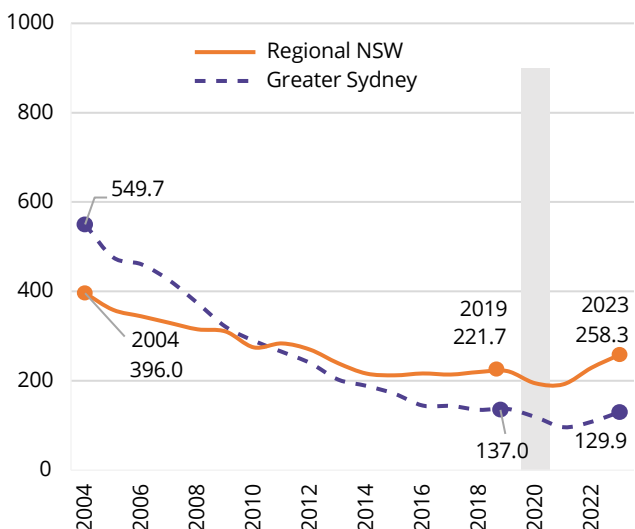


Figure 10. Steal from motor vehicle

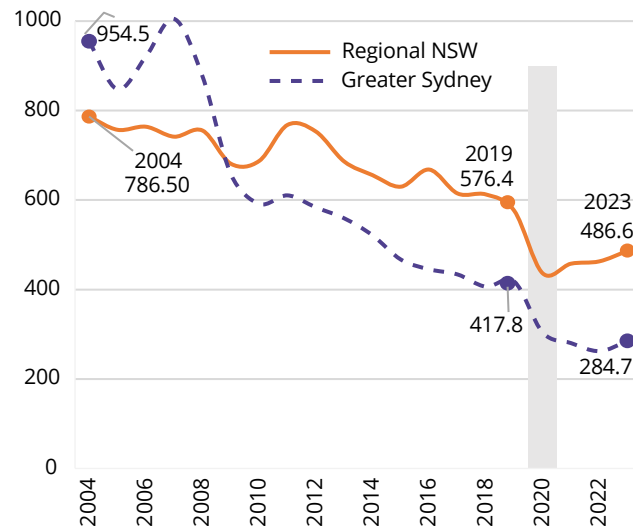


Figure 11. Steal from retail

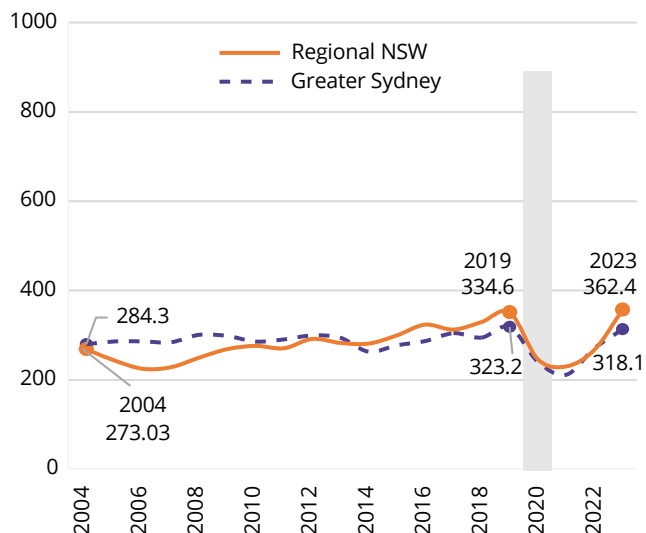


Figure 12. Steal from person and dwelling

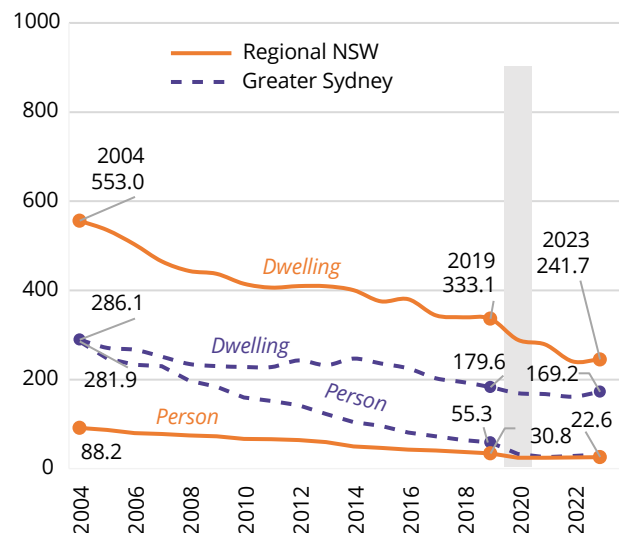
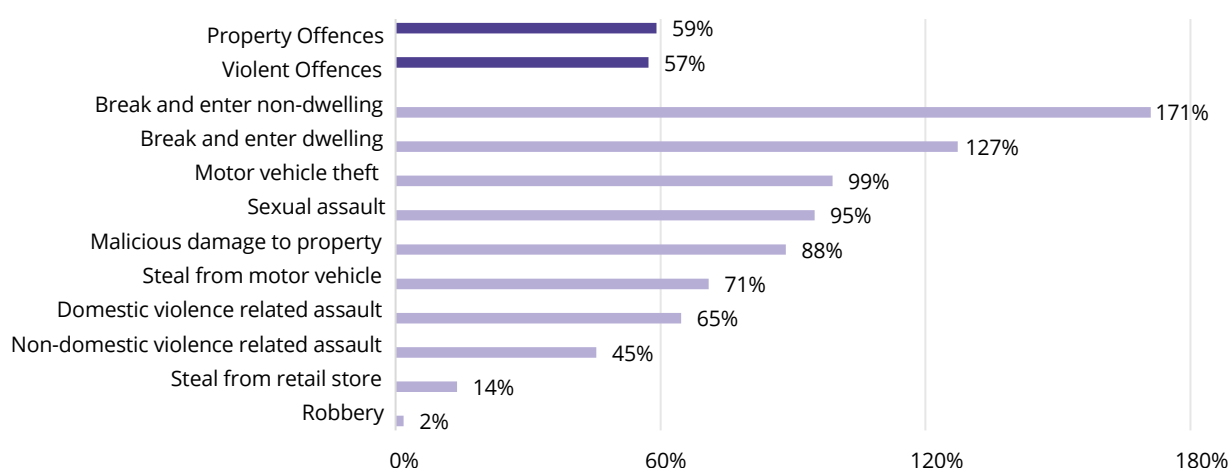


Figure 13. Percent by which crime rate in Regional NSW exceeded the crime rate in Greater Sydney; 2023



Motor Vehicle Theft

In line with other property crimes, the incidence of vehicle theft fell dramatically in Regional NSW the first two decades of this century (down 44% from 2004 to 2019 in Regional NSW, see Figure 9). From early 2022, however, vehicle theft began to increase. Figure 14 shows the monthly number of vehicles recorded stolen in the ten years to December 2023 in Regional NSW and in Greater Sydney. It is apparent that, following the pandemic, there was an increase in vehicles stolen in both Greater Sydney and in Regional NSW. However, the post-COVID increase in vehicle theft in Sydney merely reflects a return to pre-pandemic volumes. Whereas, in Regional NSW, vehicle theft has increased well beyond pre-pandemic levels. In 2023 the number of motor vehicle theft incidents recorded in Regional NSW was 20% higher than in 2019 (up from 6,157 to 7,396). In March 2023, 699 motor vehicle theft incidents were recorded in Regional NSW, the highest recorded number since January 2010.

Figure 14. Monthly number of motor vehicle theft incidents: January 2014 to December 2023

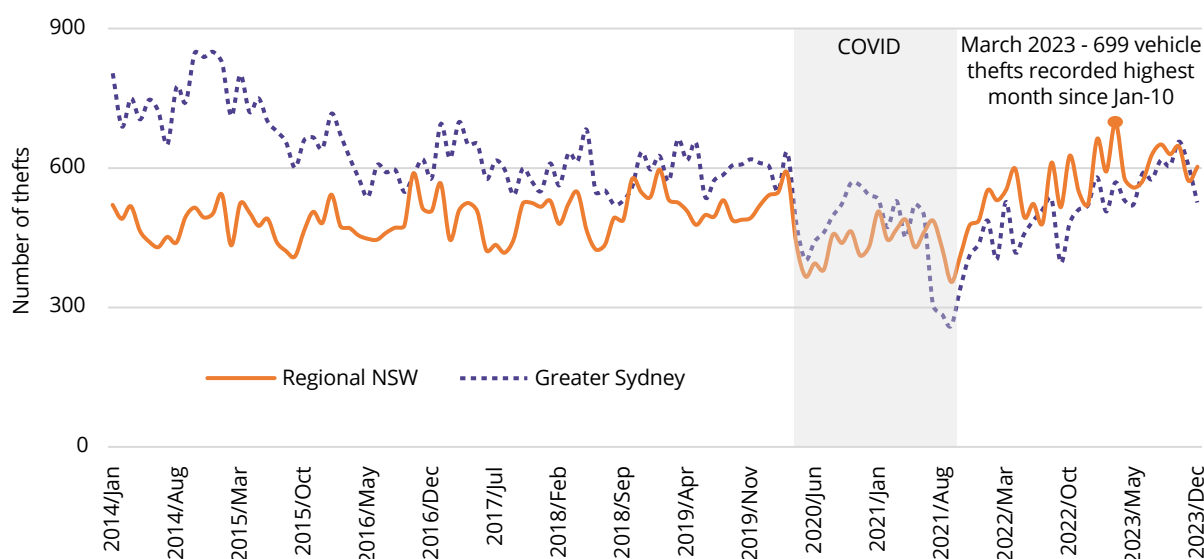
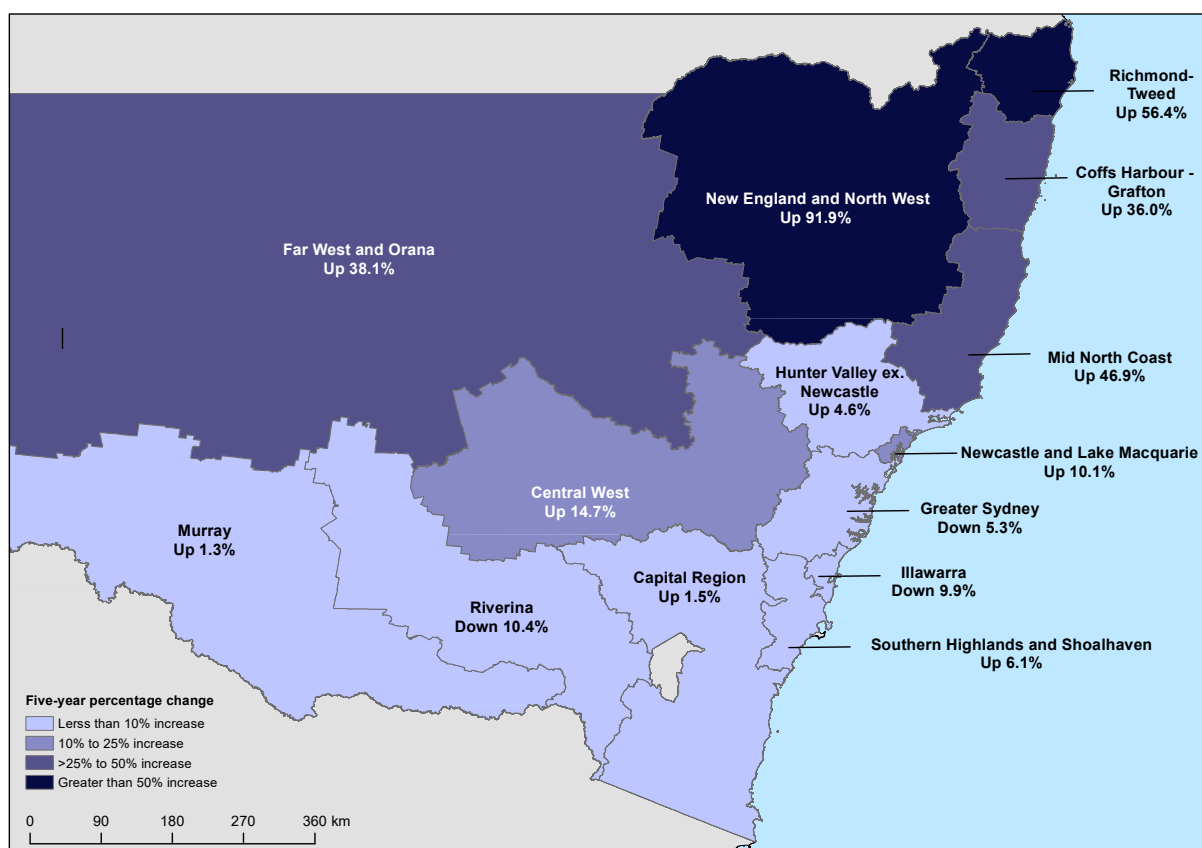


Figure 15 (and Appendix 3) presents a regional view of changes in the number of vehicles recorded as stolen over the past five years. Of the 13 Statistical Areas in Regional NSW, seven reported a marked increase in vehicle theft incidents in 2023 relative to 2019.

- New England and North-West (up 91.9% or 363 additional incidents)
- Richmond-Tweed (up 56.4% or 246 additional incidents)
- Mid North Coast (up 46.9% or 205 additional incidents),
- Far West and Orana (up 38.1% or 165 additional incidents),
- Coffs Harbour – Grafton (up 36% or 113 additional incidents),
- Central West (up 14.7% or 72 additional incidents), and
- Newcastle and Lake Macquarie (up 10.1% or 107 additional incidents).

Figure 15. Five-year percentage change in number of motor vehicle theft incidents: 2019 to 2023



Previous BOCSAR research has found that regional areas generally show higher stolen vehicle recovery rates than Greater Sydney (Cook, 2023). According to the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council, recovered stolen vehicles generally indicate short term or opportunistic thefts for the purposes of crime, joyriding, or transport. By contrast, stolen vehicles not recovered can reflect organised offences motivated by an intention to convert the car to profit either as a whole vehicle or separated parts (NMVTRC, 2021). This suggests that regional vehicle theft is more likely to be opportunistic and for the purpose of joyriding or transport.

A factor driving the long-term reduction in motor vehicle theft has been improvements in vehicle security (such as engine immobilisers) which have made vehicles more difficult to steal. This technology can be circumvented, however, if thieves have access to car keys. Police data shows a recent increase in vehicle theft incidents co-occurring with break and enter offences, which is consistent with vehicle thieves stealing

car keys. Table 2 shows the number of motor vehicle thefts recorded by NSW Police which involved a residential break and enter committed at the same time. In the past five years, the proportion of regional vehicle thefts incidents that also include a break and enter offence almost doubled, increasing from 13.5% in 2019 to 22% in 2023. Table 3 also shows that the proportion of residential break and enters where a key is recorded as stolen has similarly increase in the past five years – from 13% in 2019 to 21% in 2023. This allows for the possibility that car keys are being stolen during burglaries to facilitate motor vehicle theft.

Table 2. Criminal events with a motor vehicle theft incident recorded by NSW Police by whether a co-occurring break and enter was also recorded: 2019 to 2023

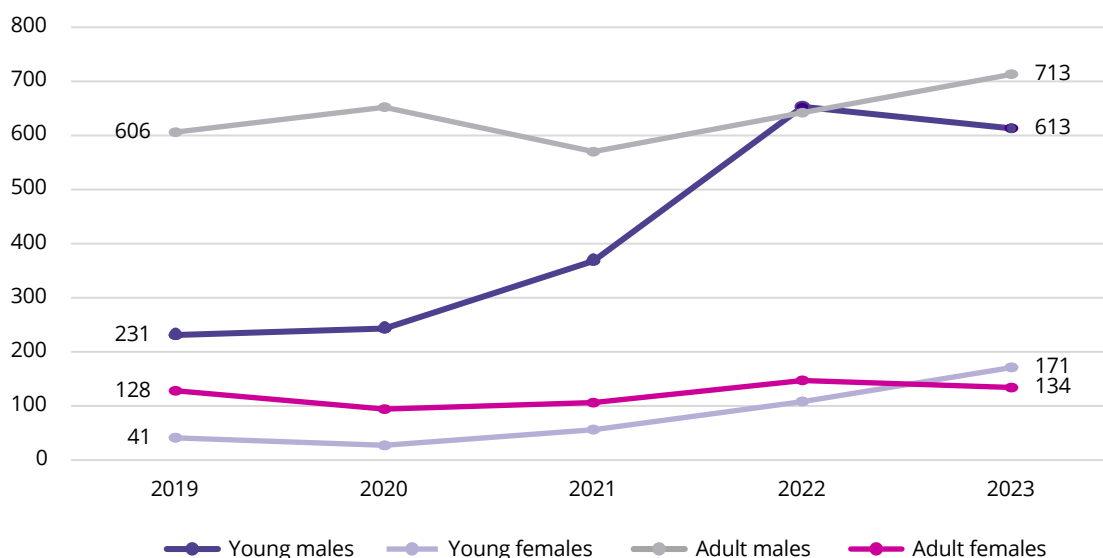
Location of vehicle theft	Was a break and enter also recorded?	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total NSW	% with co-occurring break and enter	11.2%	11.4%	13.8%	17.1%	17.4%
	Total Motor Vehicle Thefts	13,210	11,503	10,278	12,045	14,020
Greater Sydney	% with co-occurring break and enter	9.2%	9.7%	12.0%	12.1%	12.3%
	Total Motor Vehicle Thefts	7,165	6,139	4,948	5,632	6,771
Regional NSW	% with co-occurring break and enter	13.5%	13.4%	15.6%	21.5%	22.1%
	Total Motor Vehicle Thefts	6,045	5,364	5,330	6,413	7,249

Table 3. Number of incidents of break and enter dwelling in NSW where a key was recorded as stolen: 2019 to 2023

Break and enter dwelling	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of incidents	25,511	19,700	17,879	18,776	19,973
Number of incidents with any object recorded as stolen	14,369	10,548	9,540	10,077	10,837
Number of incidents with a key recorded as stolen	1,808	1,390	1,494	1,903	2,257
% of incidents with a key recorded as stolen	12.6%	13.2%	15.7%	18.9%	20.8%

We now turn our attention to who NSW Police apprehend for motor vehicle theft in Regional NSW. Figure 16 shows the age and gender of persons of interest proceeded against by NSW Police for vehicle theft between 2019 and 2023. Volumetrically, car theft in Regional NSW is more likely to be committed by an adult male. However, in the five years to 2023 legal actions against young people have increased significantly suggesting that young people are responsible for the increase in vehicle theft in Regional NSW. The number of legal actions commenced against young males for motor vehicle theft in Regional NSW increased by 382 or 165% from 2019 to 2023, while the increase for young females was 130 or 317%. Legal actions against adults increased by 113 or 15%. The increase in legal actions against young people for vehicle theft in Regional NSW accounts for 82% of the total increase in legal actions for motor vehicle theft in Regional NSW in the five years from 2019 to 2023.

Figure 16. Trends in persons of interest proceeded against for motor vehicle theft in Regional NSW by age and gender – 2019 to 2023



Trends in violent crimes by offence type

Above we saw that violent crimes collectively have been relatively stable in Regional NSW over the past 20 years, while declining in Sydney (Figure 2). Now we consider the pattern for discrete violent offences including domestic violence related assault, non-domestic violence related assault, sexual offences and robbery. Trends for each of these offences have played out quite differently.

From charts 17 to 21, we can see that reports of domestic violence related assault and sexual assault have increased over the past two decades. While this has been the case in both Regional NSW and Greater Sydney, the regional increases have been much greater. From 2004 to 2023, reported rates of domestic violence related assault in Regional NSW have increased 23% (compared to a 12% increase in Sydney), sexual assault reports have increased 101% (compared to a 70% increase in Sydney), and there has been a 29% increase in rates of sexual touching offences (compared to an increase of 19% in Sydney). As shown in Appendix 2, regional rates of non-domestic assault declined over the long-term; but have recently increased by 11% in the five years from 2019 to 2023. Robbery has also shown declines - down by 51% in Regional NSW since 2004 (compared to a much larger decline of 85% in Sydney) and down 5% since 2019 (compared to a 33% decrease in Sydney).

A regional breakdown of five-year trends in the number of domestic, non-domestic, sexual assault and sexual touching is presented in Appendix 3. This shows that the majority of regional locations have seen sizeable increases in domestic violence related assault, non-domestic violence related assault and sexual assault in the five years from 2019 to 2023.

Charts 17 to 21 also show that violent crime is much more prevalent in Regional NSW compared with Sydney in each of these offence types. This is outlined in figure 13 which showed the extent to which crime rates in Regional NSW exceeded Sydney in 2023 for particular offences. In 2023, the rate of domestic violence related assault in Regional NSW exceeded the Sydney rate by 65%, non-domestic assault exceeded Sydney levels by 45%, sexual assault exceeded Sydney levels by 95%, and sexual touching exceeded Sydney levels by 58%. The notable exception is robbery where there is now parity between Regional NSW and Greater Sydney due a large decline in the city.

Figure 17-21. Rate of violent crime incidents per 100,000 population by region: 2004 to 2023

Figure 17. Domestic violence related assault

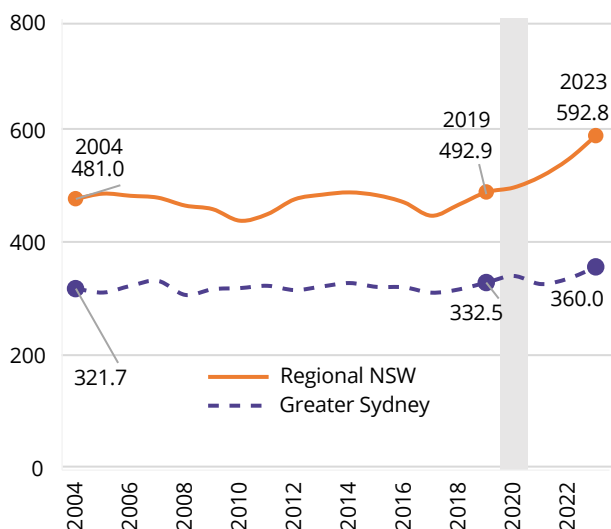


Figure 18. Non-domestic violence related assault

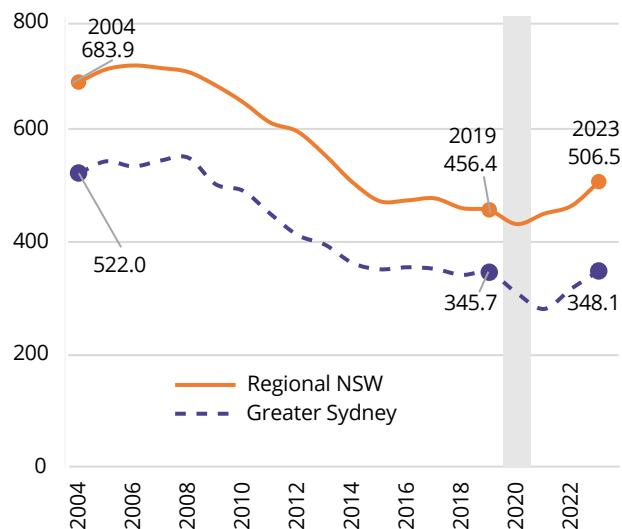


Figure 19. Sexual assault

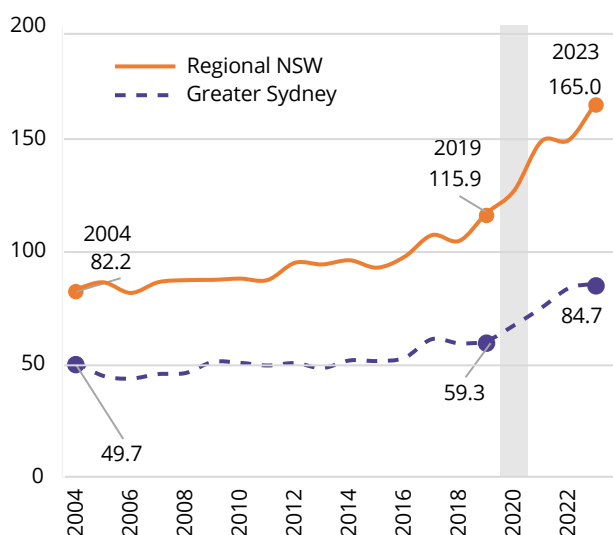


Figure 20. Sexual touching

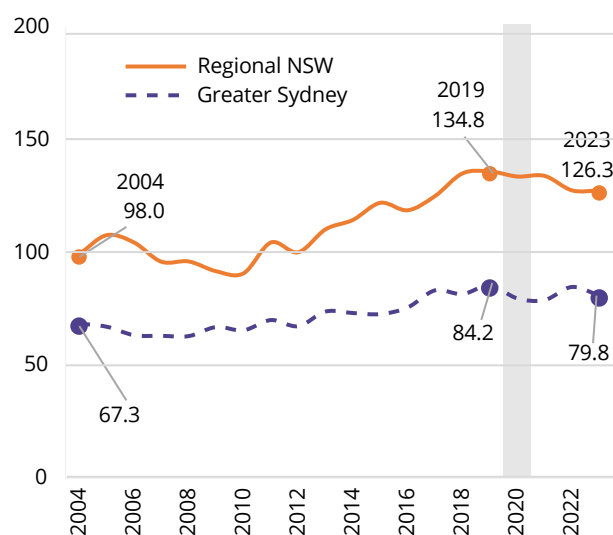
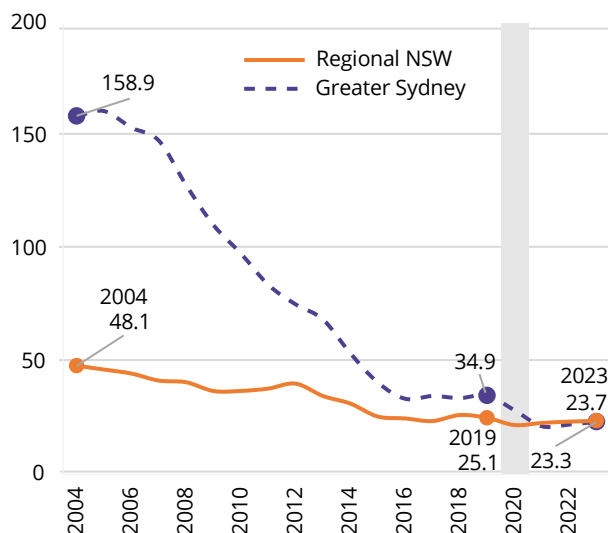


Figure 21. Robbery



Non-domestic assault

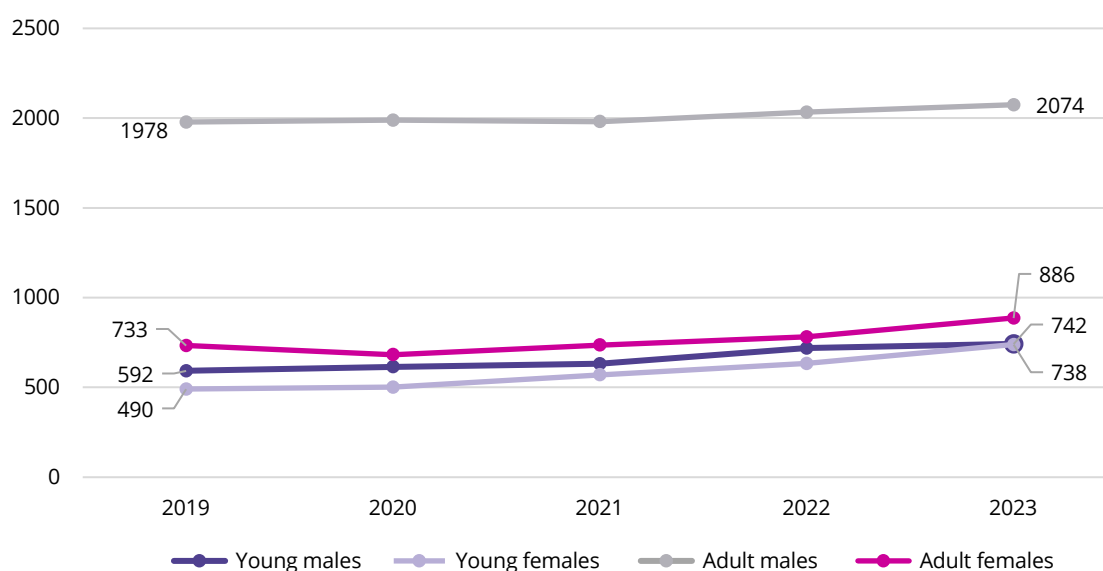
Above (and in Appendix 3) we saw that the number of non-domestic assault increased 14% from 2019 to 2023 in Regional NSW. Table 4 shows the common premises types where incidents of reported non-domestic assault occurred in Regional NSW. In the five years to 2023, there were an additional 1,825 incidents of non-domestic assault recorded in Regional NSW. Forty percent of this increase came from non-domestic assaults in residential premises (735 additional incidents), 31% of the increase came from schools (558 additional incidents), and 21% of the increase was accounted for by non-domestic assaults at commercial premises (primarily shopping complexes, supermarkets, hospitality venues, and wholesalers).

Table 4. Recorded incidents of non-domestic assault in Regional NSW by premises, 2019 to 2023

Premises	2019	2023	Volume change	% of total change
Residential	4,216	4,951	735	40.3%
Schools	945	1,503	558	30.6%
Commercial	1,214	1,593	379	20.8%
Health	318	417	99	5.4%
Outdoors	3,487	3,584	97	5.3%
Other	2,495	2,452	-43	-2.4%
Total	1,2675	145,00	1,825	100.0%

Figure 22 considers the population groups likely to be responsible for the increase by showing trends in persons of interest proceeded against for non-domestic violent related assault by age and gender in the five years to 2023. Nearly half the legal actions for non-domestic assault in Regional NSW are directed at adult males (47% of legal actions in 2023). In 2023, adult women were involved in 20% of legal actions and young people were involved in a third of legal actions. Legal actions increased against all population groups from 2019 to 2023: adult males up 96 legal actions or 5%, adult females up 153 legal actions or 21%, young males up 150 legal actions or 25% and young females up 248 legal actions or 51%.

Figure 22. Trends in persons of interest proceeded against for non-domestic assault in Regional NSW by age and gender – 2019 to 2023



Sexual assault

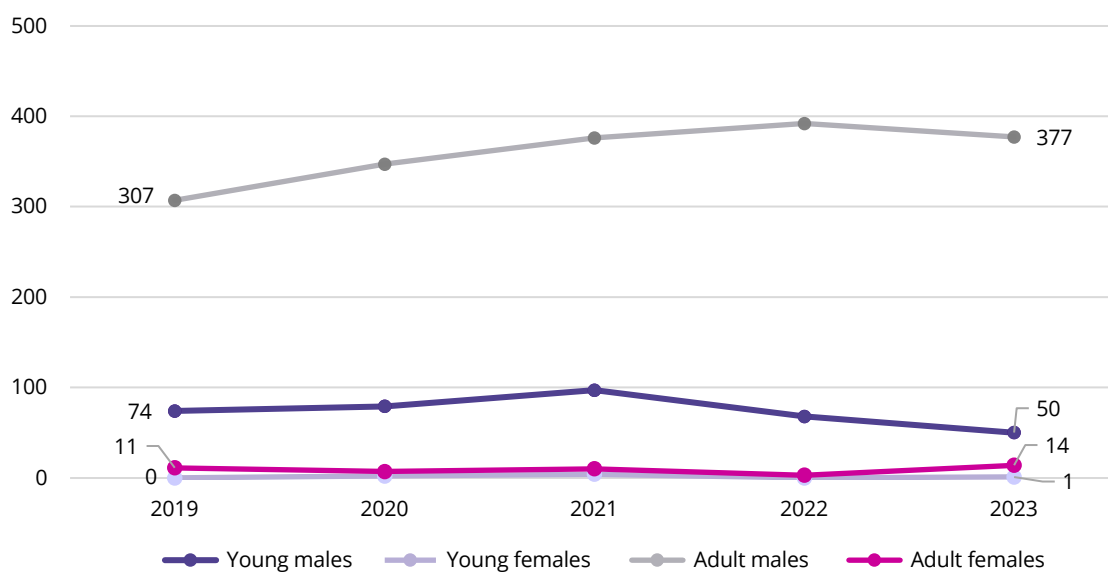
Sexual assault reports increased by 1,505 incidents in Regional NSW from 2019 to 2023 (up 46.8%). Table 5 divides police Sexual assault reports into three main typologies in order to better understand the nature of the offence and how it has increased in Regional NSW. Incidents involving adult victims (aged 16+ years) were the most common sexual assault reported in 2023 and accounted for 50% of the increase from 2019 to 2023. Sexual assault reports involving adult victims overtook contemporary child sexual assault reports in terms of prevalence. While contemporary child sexual assaults also increased from 2019 to 2023 it was by a lesser margin. Historic child sexual assault reports were the least common in 2023 – but still accounted for 35% of the total increase.⁴

Table 5. Recorded incidents of sexual assault in Regional NSW by type, 2019 to 2023

Type of recorded assault	2019	2023	Volume change	% increase	% of total change
Adult Victim (16+ Years Old)	1,078	1,831	753	69.9%	50.0%
Child Victim Reported When Adult	660	1,180	520	78.8%	34.6%
Child Victim Reported When Child	1,480	1,712	232	15.7%	15.4%
Sexual Assault - total	3,218	4,723	1,505	46.8%	100.0%

Figure 23 shows legal actions commenced for sexual assault in Regional NSW from 2019 to 2023. In Regional NSW, the increase in sexual assault legal actions is entirely driven by adult male offenders (up 23% or 70 additional offenders).

Figure 23. Trends in persons of interest proceeded against for sexual assault in Regional NSW by age and gender – 2019 to 2023



⁴ The adult/child split in this analysis follows the legal age of consent law. Accordingly, 'adult victims' include victims aged 16 and 17 years and 'child victims' are aged 15 years and under.

Domestic Violence related assault

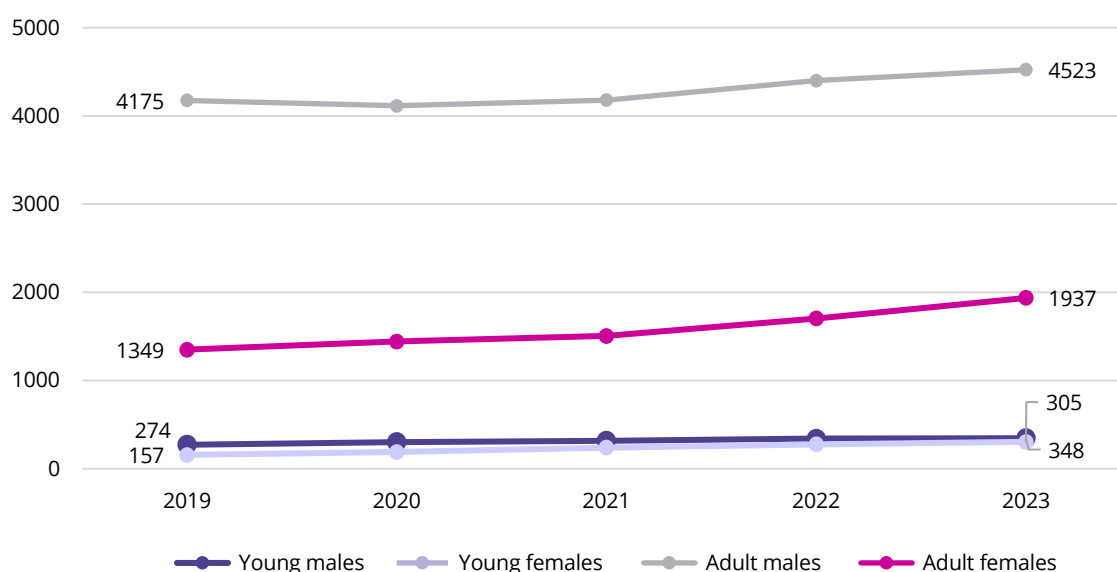
Above (and in Appendix 3) we saw that domestic violence related assault reports increased by 24% in Regional NSW crime 2019 to 2023. Table 6 shows victims of domestic violence related assault recorded by NSW Police in Regional NSW by the relationship between the victim and the offender. The biggest increase between 2019 and 2023 has been among victims of family violence who account for almost half of the total increase in domestic violence victims. Victims of intimate partner violence have also increased and account for 37% of the total increase.

Table 6. Recorded victims of domestic assault in Regional NSW by relationship to suspected offender, 2019 to 2023

Relationship	2019	2023	Volume change	% change	% of total change
Intimate partner	8,272	9,628	1,356	16.4%	36.9%
Family	5,145	6,956	1,811	35.2%	49.3%
Other	1,226	1,676	450	36.7%	12.2%
Unknown	32	92	60	187.5%	1.6%
Total	14,675	18,352	3,677	25.1%	100.0%

When we look at who is responsible for the regional increase in domestic assaults, adult males are again the primary offenders (64% of legal actions in 2023 in Regional NSW involved an adult male, Figure 24). In the five years to 2023 however, the largest increase in legal actions was against young females (up 94%; an increase of 148 legal actions) followed by adult females (up 44%, an increase of 588). In fact, the increase in legal actions against females for domestic assault in Regional NSW accounts for 64% of the total increase in legal actions in the last five years. Legal actions against adult men increased by 8% in Regional NSW from 2019 to 2023 (up 348 legal actions).

Figure 24. Trends in persons of interest proceeded against for domestic assault in Regional NSW by age and gender – 2019 to 2023



CONCLUSION

The rate of crime in Regional NSW is significantly higher than in Sydney. In 2023 the property crime rate was 59% higher in Regional NSW compared with Greater Sydney while the violent crime rate was 57% higher. Disparity also exists within Regional NSW and some locations show crime rates two and even three times higher than the NSW average.

The crime inequality experienced by regional communities is a longstanding feature of crime in NSW. The gap, however, has grown over the past decade as changes in crime have generally been more favourable in Sydney. From 2004 to 2023 property crime fell in both Sydney and Regional NSW but the size of the fall was larger in Sydney (down 67% in Sydney from 2004 to 2023 compared with a 48% decline in Regional NSW). In 2023 the rate of recorded violent crime was 20% lower in Sydney compared with 2004, whereas in Regional NSW the violent crime rate was equivalent to 2004 levels.

While crime is higher in Regional NSW than in Sydney, it is not the case that crime is universally increasing in Regional NSW. In Regional NSW most property crimes and non-domestic assault were considerably lower in 2023 compared to 2004. Even over the recent short term, in Regional NSW most major crimes in 2023 were lower or equivalent to where they were five years ago, prior to the pandemic. This is true of break and enter dwelling, break and enter non-dwelling, steal from motor vehicle, steal from dwelling, steal from person, other theft, retail theft, sexual touching, and robbery 2029.

There are, however, four major offences that have significantly increased in Regional NSW over the five years from 2019 to 2023

- Motor vehicle theft (up 20% or 1,239 additional incidents)
- Sexual assault (up by 47% or 1,505 additional incidents)
- Domestic assault (up by 24% or 3,284 additional incidents)
- Non-domestic assault (up 14% or 1,825 additional incidents)

This paper highlights the longstanding disparity between crime rates in the regions versus the capital city. Some factors that may account for the regional variation in crime rates include: socio-economic disadvantage and poverty, unemployment, drug and alcohol use and the availability of recreational and educational opportunities for young people. The discrepancy between crime rates in the city and the country will continue to be closely monitored.

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Appendix 1. Rate of property and violent crime in NSW Statistical Areas and ratio to NSW average: 2023

Region	Violent Crime		Property Crime	
	Rate	Ratio to NSW	Rate	Ratio to NSW
Total NSW	1,128.7	1.0	1,685.5	1.0
Greater Sydney	924.2	0.8	1,396.2	0.8
Regional NSW	1,453.4	1.3	2,220.9	1.3
Capital Region	1,100.0	1.0	1,341.8	0.8
Central West	1,634.0	1.4	2,362.1	1.4
Coffs Harbour - Grafton	1,897.7	1.7	2,109.1	1.3
Far West and Orana	3,252.2	2.9	4,476.5	2.7
Hunter Valley exc. Newcastle	1,484.4	1.3	2,075.9	1.2
Illawarra	906.9	0.8	1,805.7	1.1
Mid North Coast	1,529.6	1.4	2,133.3	1.3
Murray	1,492.4	1.3	2,380.4	1.4
New England and North West	2,072.1	1.8	3,215.7	1.9
Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	1,242.2	1.1	2,567.1	1.5
Richmond - Tweed	1,149.3	1.0	1,906.4	1.1
Riverina	1,594.9	1.4	2,161.8	1.3
Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	1,051.4	0.9	1,459.0	0.9

Appendix 2. Percentage change in the rate of recorded property crime and violent crime – by offence type

Offence	Region	20-year trends (2004 to 2023)	15-year trends (2009 to 2023)	10-year trends (2014 to 2023)	5-year trends (2019 to 2023)
Break and enter dwelling	Regional NSW	-55%	-42%	-33%	-17%
	Greater Sydney	-79%	-69%	-56%	-29%
	NSW total	-70%	-59%	-52%	-31%
Break and enter non-dwelling	Regional NSW	-69%	-58%	-30%	-12%
	Greater Sydney	-82%	-65%	-46%	-18%
	NSW total	-76%	-61%	-54%	-29%
Motor vehicle theft	Regional NSW	-35%	-17%	20%	17%
	Greater Sydney	-76%	-59%	-31%	-5%
	NSW total	-65%	-45%	-30%	-8%
Steal from motor vehicle	Regional NSW	-38%	-29%	-26%	-16%
	Greater Sydney	-70%	-57%	-45%	-32%
	NSW total	-60%	-47%	-45%	-30%
Steal from retail	Regional NSW	33%	32%	27%	2%
	Greater Sydney	12%	5%	19%	-2%
	NSW total	18%	14%	-7%	-12%
Steal from dwelling	Regional NSW	-56%	-44%	-39%	-27%
	Greater Sydney	-41%	-25%	-31%	-6%
	NSW total	-50%	-36%	-36%	-23%
Steal from person	Regional NSW	-74%	-67%	-51%	-27%
	Greater Sydney	-90%	-84%	-72%	-49%
	NSW total	-88%	-81%	-75%	-54%
Other theft	Regional NSW	-61%	-50%	-42%	-30%
	Greater Sydney	-67%	-50%	-43%	-25%
	NSW total	-65%	-50%	-52%	-35%
Domestic violence related assault	Regional NSW	23%	-28%	20%	20%
	Greater Sydney	12%	-12%	9%	8%
	NSW total	15%	19%	8%	11%
Non-domestic violence related assault	Regional NSW	-26%	25%	0%	11%
	Greater Sydney	-33%	31%	-4%	1%
	NSW total	-30%	-27%	-17%	-5%
Sexual assault	Regional NSW	101%	-91%	74%	42%
	Greater Sydney	70%	-70%	67%	43%
	NSW total	85%	82%	76%	50%
Sexual touching	Regional NSW	29%	40%	12%	-6%
	Greater Sydney	19%	21%	11%	-5%
	NSW total	22%	30%	17%	1%
Robbery	Regional NSW	-51%	-36%	-24%	-5%
	Greater Sydney	-85%	-79%	-57%	-33%
	NSW total	-80%	-72%	-60%	-28%

Appendix 3. Percentage change in the number of major offences from 2019 to 2023 (excluding those where change was between -10% and +10%)

Region	DV assault	Non DV assault	Sexual assault	Sexual touching etc.	Robbery	Break and enter dwelling	Break and enter non- dwelling	Motor vehicle theft	Steal from motor vehicle	Steal from retail store	Other stealing offences	Malicious damage
Regional NSW	24.0%	14.4%	46.8%			-14.4%		20.1%	-13.0%		-26.5%	
Capital Region	52.8%	19.0%	42.6%	-13.6%		-34.8%	-17.2%		-32.1%		-22.0%	
Central West	13.3%		22.8%		-16.7%	-18.2%	-11.4%	14.7%			-26.7%	
Coffs Harbour - Grafton	80.7%	23.5%	81.2%	27.8%		-24.3%		36.0%		-19.5%	-31.5%	
Far West And Orana	16.4%	17.4%	17.4%		17.1%		40.8%	38.1%	-25.7%	14.6%	-17.4%	
Hunter Valley Exc Newcastle	46.2%	28.0%	45.8%	10.9%	14.0%	-24.0%	-15.6%				-28.8%	
Illawarra		11.6%	39.8%		-20.5%	-26.8%	-28.5%	-9.9%			-21.3%	-18.3%
Mid North Coast	44.2%	20.3%	41.3%				-20.7%	46.9%	-14.1%		-26.7%	
Murray	31.0%	18.9%	59.0%	-11.1%	-27.6%	-35.9%	-16.6%		-15.5%	-13.3%	-26.4%	
New England And North West	23.2%	17.9%	38.6%		50.0%	13.0%		91.9%	-15.4%		-18.0%	
Newcastle And Lake Macquarie			57.3%	-15.7%		-12.7%	-17.9%	10.1%			-33.6%	-15.2%
Richmond - Tweed			66.0%				35.7%	56.4%		33.2%	-26.0%	
Riverina			75.4%	-12.3%	-20.0%	-26.0%	-33.5%	-10.4%	-41.1%	-20.6%	-32.0%	-15.5%
Southern Highlands And Shoalhaven	19.8%	33.7%	44.9%		-32.3%	-20.4%			-16.8%	21.5%	-25.1%	19.6%
Greater Sydney			42.6%		-33.4%	-29.2%	-18.5%		-31.9%		-21.4%	-20.6%
NSW	15.1%		46.9%		-24.8%	-21.7%	-13.2%		-24.0%		-23.6%	-13.8%

increase of more than 20%	increase between 10% and 20%	Decrease exceeds 20%	Decrease of between 10% and 20%
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