

# Crime and Justice Statistics

Bureau Brief

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# AN UPDATE OF LONG-TERM TRENDS IN PROPERTY AND VIOLENT CRIME IN NEW SOUTH WALES: 1990-2005

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This paper describes trends in the recorded incidence of major categories of property and violent crime between 1990 and 2005 in New South Wales (NSW). The data presented here are an update of the property and violent crime trends reported in Bulletin Number 90. The only major difference found in this more recent analysis is a statistically significant downward trend in the incident rate of motor vehicle theft for the period 1990-2005. In the earlier analysis, the trend for this property offence category was stable.

# **DATA SOURCES**

With the exception of *murder*, the data presented here refer to the number of police recorded criminal incidents per 100,000 population. For *murder*, rates are calculated on the numbers of *murder* victims per 100,000 population. Data from NSW Police's Computerised Operational Policing System (COPS) have been used to calculate offence rates for the period 1995-2005. Criminal incident data for 1994 and for the years prior to the introduction of COPS have been taken from the Bureau's recorded crime statistics report series, *NSW Recorded Crime Statistics*.

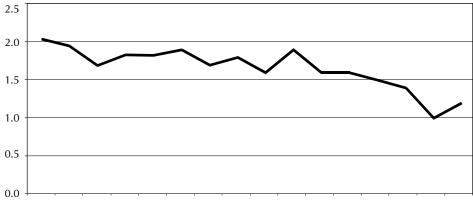
Given that recorded crime data include only crimes that come to the attention of the police and not all criminal acts are reported to the authorities, the trends in recorded crime presented here should be compared with data from crime victim surveys. A summary of these data for the relevant period is provided in Moffatt and Poynton (2006).

#### PERSONAL CRIME

Figure 1 shows the number of *murder* victims in NSW per 100,000 population from 1990 to 2005. Figures 2, 3 and 4 show the number of recorded *assault*, *sexual* 

Figure 1: NSW murder rate, 1990-2005

Rate per 100,000 population



1990 1991 1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005

offences and robbery incidents per 100,000 population from 1990 to 2005, respectively. The major points to note from these figures are:

- A significant downward trend in the NSW murder rate (down 41%) over the 16-year period. Much of the decline in the murder rate during this period has occurred in the last six years, with the rate per 100,000 population decreasing by 37 per cent from 1999 to 2005.
- A significant upward trend in the NSW assault rate (up 105%) over the 16-year period. In the early 1990's the recorded assault rate was about 500 incidents per 100,000 population. However, by 2001 the recorded assault rate had climbed to

- over 1,000 incidents per 100,000 population. Since 2002, the *assault* rate has fallen slightly.
- A significant upward trend in the recorded crime rate of both sexual assault (up 117%) and other sexual offences¹ (up 85%) in NSW over the 16year period. In both cases, however, most of the increase occurred in the mid to late 1990s. After 1997 the recorded rate of sexual assault fell back from 57.4 incidents to around 50 incidents per 100,000 persons, before slowly increasing to around 60 incidents per 100,000 persons. The recorded rate of other sexual offences, on the other hand, fell back from 98.1 to around 80 incidents per 100,000 of population, whereupon it has remained relatively stable.

Figure 2: NSW assault rate, 1990-2005

#### Rate per 100,000 population

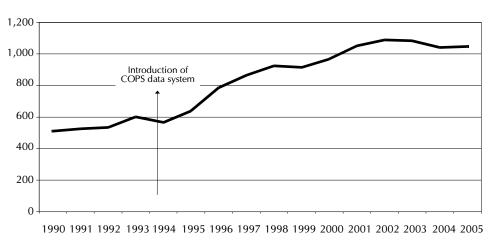
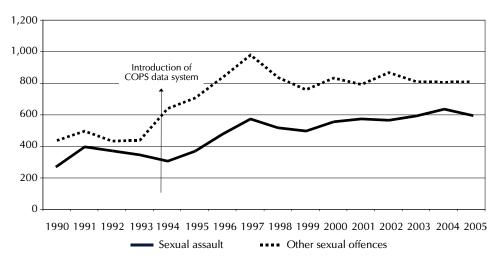


Figure 3: NSW sexual offence rates, 1990-2005

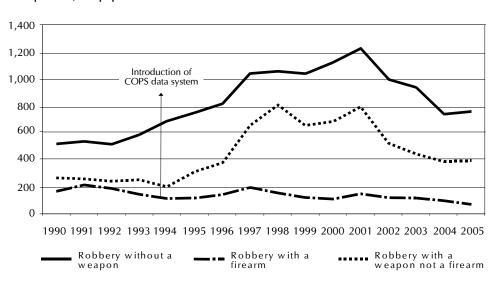
# Rate per 100,000 population



- A significant upward trend in the recorded rates of robbery without a weapon (up by 46%) and robbery with a weapon not a firearm (up by 47%). The upward trend, however, has been anything but uniform. The recorded rate of robbery without a weapon more than doubled between 1990 and 2001 but between 2001 and 2005 the recorded rate of this offence fell by 38 per cent, from 122.5 per 100,000 of population to 75.9 per 100,000 of
- population. A similar trend is also apparent for the offence of *robbery with a weapon not a firearm*. Between 1990 and 2001, the recorded rate of *robbery with a weapon not a firearm* almost tripled. Since 2001 however, the recorded rate of this offence has halved.
- A significant downward trend in the NSW rate of robbery with a firearm (down by 57%) over the period 1990 to 2005.

Figure 4: NSW robbery rates, 1990-2005

#### Rate per 100,000 population



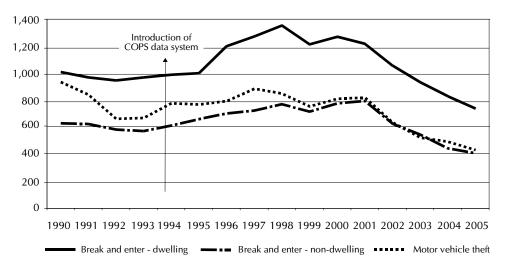
# **PROPERTY CRIME**

Figure 5 shows trends in the recorded rates of three major theft categories: break and enter – dwelling, break and enter – non-dwelling and motor vehicle theft. The major points to note from this figure are:

 A significant downward trend in recorded rates of motor vehicle theft (down by 54%) over the 16-year period. After a fall in this theft category in the early part of last decade, the incident rate for motor vehicle theft began to increase slightly from 1993 onwards. From about 1997, the rate of motor

Figure 5: NSW break and enter and motor vehicle theft rates, 1990-2005

#### Rate per 100,000 population



- vehicle theft stabilised at around 800 incidents per 100,000 persons and then dropped sharply from 2001 onwards, falling by 47 per cent.
- Crime rates for burglary offences also fell slightly in the early part of last decade but from about 1993 onwards began to increase. The increase was particularly marked in the case of break and enter non-dwelling, which rose by 39 per cent between 1993 and 2001. From 2001 onwards, however, burglary offences began to fall sharply, with break and enter dwelling falling by 39 per cent and break and enter non-dwelling falling by 49 per cent. Although the overall trend was stable, recorded rates of burglary are now at their lowest levels in 16 years.

### **NOTES**

 The offence category 'other sexual offences' includes recorded incidents of indecent assault, acts of indecency and other sexual offences (e.g. wilful and obscene exposure, peep or pry).

# **REFERENCES**

Moffatt & Poynton 2006, 'Long term trends in property and violent crime in NSW: 1990-2004', *Crime and Justice Bulletin*, no. 90, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, Sydney.

# **APPENDIX**

Table A1: Number of criminal incidents recorded by NSW Police by year and offence type

|      | Murder^ | Assault | Sexual<br>assault | Other<br>sexual<br>offences | Robbery<br>without a<br>weapon | Robbery<br>with a<br>firearm | Robbery<br>with a<br>weapon<br>not a<br>firearm | Break<br>& enter<br>dwelling | Break<br>& enter<br>non-<br>dwelling | Motor<br>vehicle<br>theft |
|------|---------|---------|-------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|---|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1990 | 119     | 29,776  | 1,606             | 2,552                       | 3,022                          | 981                          | 1,568   | 58,862                       | 36,639                               | 54,488                    |
| 1991 | 115     | 31,014  | 2,343             | 2,942                       | 3,173                          | 1,265                        | 1,542   | 57,155                       | 36,838                               | 49,758                    |
| 1992 | 101     | 31,773  | 2,220             | 2,583                       | 3,080                          | 1,132                        | 1,444   | 56,437                       | 34,754                               | 39,423                    |
| 1993 | 110     | 36,076  | 2,083             | 2,646                       | 3,525                          | 877                          | 1,528   | 58,036                       | 34,379                               | 40,169                    |
| 1994 | 83      | 25,732  | 1,397             | 2,908                       | 3,120                          | 522                          | 912   | 44,850                       | 27,858                               | 35,304                    |
| 1995 | 114     | 39,132  | 2,272             | 4,337                       | 4,601                          | 726                          | 1,922   | 61,336                       | 40,393                               | 47,078                    |
| 1996 | 106     | 48,869  | 2,973             | 5,211                       | 5,067                          | 892                          | 2,359   | 74,546                       | 43,551                               | 49,187                    |
| 1997 | 112     | 54,304  | 3,601             | 6,156                       | 6,526                          | 1,234                        | 4,125   | 79,838                       | 45,467                               | 55,539                    |
| 1998 | 100     | 58,672  | 3,291             | 5,310                       | 6,700                          | 987                          | 5,130   | 85,768                       | 48,772                               | 53,851                    |
| 1999 | 123     | 58,646  | 3,201             | 4,874                       | 6,658                          | 780                          | 4,213   | 77,852                       | 45,995                               | 48,401                    |
| 2000 | 103     | 62,797  | 3,615             | 5,408                       | 7,284                          | 722                          | 4,459   | 82,427                       | 50,470                               | 52,624                    |
| 2001 | 104     | 69,165  | 3,771             | 5,217                       | 8,055                          | 992                          | 5,229   | 80,121                       | 52,328                               | 53,932                    |
| 2002 | 97      | 72,279  | 3,758             | 5,763                       | 6,614                          | 805                          | 3,486   | 70,042                       | 41,523                               | 42,078                    |
| 2003 | 92      | 72,419  | 3,968             | 5,422                       | 6,270                          | 793                          | 2,971   | 62,327                       | 36,374                               | 34,898                    |
| 2004 | 69      | 70,122  | 4,291             | 5,426                       | 4,973                          | 666                          | 2,609   | 55,853                       | 29,833                               | 33,234                    |
| 2005 | 79      | 70,497  | 4,016             | 5,449                       | 5,109                          | 488                          | 2,656   | 49,694                       | 27,492                               | 29,103                    |

<sup>^</sup> For murder, the number shown is the number of recorded victims rather than criminal incidents

Table A2: Number of criminal incidents recorded by NSW Police per 100,000 population by year and offence type

|      | Murder^ | Assault | Sexual<br>assault | Other<br>sexual<br>offences | Robbery<br>without a<br>weapon | Robbery<br>with a<br>firearm | Robbery<br>with a<br>weapon<br>not a<br>firearm | Break<br>& enter<br>dwelling | Break<br>& enter<br>non-<br>dwelling | Motor<br>vehicle<br>theft |
|------|---------|---------|-------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|---|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1990 | 2.0     | 511.0   | 27.6              | 43.8                        | 51.9                           | 16.8                         | 26.9  | 1,010.2                      | 628.8                                | 935.1                     |
| 1991 | 1.9     | 525.8   | 39.7              | 49.9                        | 53.8                           | 21.4                         | 26.1  | 968.9                        | 624.5                                | 843.5                     |
| 1992 | 1.7     | 533.2   | 37.3              | 43.3                        | 51.7                           | 19.0                         | 24.2  | 947.1                        | 583.2                                | 661.6                     |
| 1993 | 1.8     | 601.5   | 34.7              | 44.1                        | 58.8                           | 14.6                         | 25.5  | 967.7                        | 573.2                                | 669.8                     |
| 1994 | 1.8     | 567.2   | 30.8              | 64.1                        | 68.8                           | 11.5                         | 20.1  | 988.6                        | 614.0                                | 778.2                     |
| 1995 | 1.9     | 638.7   | 37.1              | 70.8                        | 75.1                           | 11.8                         | 31.4  | 1,001.1                      | 659.3                                | 768.4                     |
| 1996 | 1.7     | 787.6   | 47.9              | 84.0                        | 81.7                           | 14.4                         | 38.0  | 1,201.4                      | 701.9                                | 792.7                     |
| 1997 | 1.8     | 865.1   | 57.4              | 98.1                        | 104.0                          | 19.7                         | 65.7  | 1,271.9                      | 724.3                                | 884.8                     |
| 1998 | 1.6     | 925.6   | 51.9              | 83.8                        | 105.7                          | 15.6                         | 80.9  | 1,353.0                      | 769.4                                | 849.5                     |
| 1999 | 1.9     | 914.7   | 49.9              | 76.0                        | 103.8                          | 12.2                         | 65.7  | 1,214.3                      | 717.4                                | 754.9                     |
| 2000 | 1.6     | 968.2   | 55.7              | 83.4                        | 112.3                          | 11.1                         | 68.7  | 1,270.8                      | 778.1                                | 811.3                     |
| 2001 | 1.6     | 1,051.9 | 57.4              | 79.3                        | 122.5                          | 15.1                         | 79.5  | 1,218.5                      | 795.8                                | 820.2                     |
| 2002 | 1.5     | 1,089.5 | 56.6              | 86.9                        | 99.7                           | 12.1                         | 52.5  | 1,055.8                      | 625.9                                | 634.3                     |
| 2003 | 1.4     | 1,083.8 | 59.4              | 81.1                        | 93.8                           | 11.9                         | 44.5  | 932.8                        | 544.4                                | 522.3                     |
| 2004 | 1.0     | 1,041.7 | 63.7              | 80.6                        | 73.9                           | 9.9                          | 38.8  | 829.8                        | 443.2                                | 493.7                     |
| 2005 | 1.2     | 1,047.3 | 59.7              | 81.0                        | 75.9                           | 7.2                          | 39.5  | 738.3                        | 408.4                                | 432.4                     |

<sup>^</sup> For murder, the rate is the number of recorded victims per 100,000 population