



# Will Gun Control Make Us Safe? Debunking the Myths

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An evaluation of firearm laws in Canada  
and in the English Commonwealth

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An invited presentation:

**Insights: Guns and Gangs**  
**Ontario Police College**  
**Toronto, Ontario**  
**May 24-25, 2006**

# Outline of presentation

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- Who is Gary Mauser?
- Guns in Canada
- Evaluating gun laws
  - Public safety
  - Public health
- A natural quasi-experiment
- What works?
- Conclusions

# Who is Gary Mauser?



- 
- Social psychologist
  - Published two books on political marketing
  - Published 40 + articles on guns and violence
  - Immigrant from California
  - Canadian citizen for over 25 years

# Warning - Statistics Ahead!



- 
- Myth: statisticians can achieve any result they want by manipulating the procedures used
  - Thus, no one should trust results that do not confirm their expectations
  - Recommendation: Be skeptical, not cynical

# Firearms in Canada



- 
- Canadians have owned firearms for centuries
    - Many early settlers were retired British soldiers
    - Hunters, trappers, farmers
  - The Canadian militia has repulsed invasions

# Firearms in Canada



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- **Current reasons for owning firearms:**

- Hunting 73%
- Target shooting 13%
- Pest control 8%
- Protection 6%

Source: GPC Research, 2001



# Firearms in Canada



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- **Percentage of households with firearms:**

1976	35%
1992	27%
1998	21%
2001	17%

Source: Survey reports in GPC Research, 2001

# Canadian firearms legislation



- 
- 1977 police screening for firearm purchasers
  - 1991 stiffer rules for ownership,  
a variety of firearms prohibited  
magazine capacity limited
  - 1995 small-calibre handguns banned
  - 1998 owner licensing, universal firearm  
registration

# The assumptions behind universal firearms registration

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- Registration restricts the availability of firearms
- Reduced availability will cut total criminal violence and domestic violence
- Limited availability will reduce both firearm suicides and total suicides

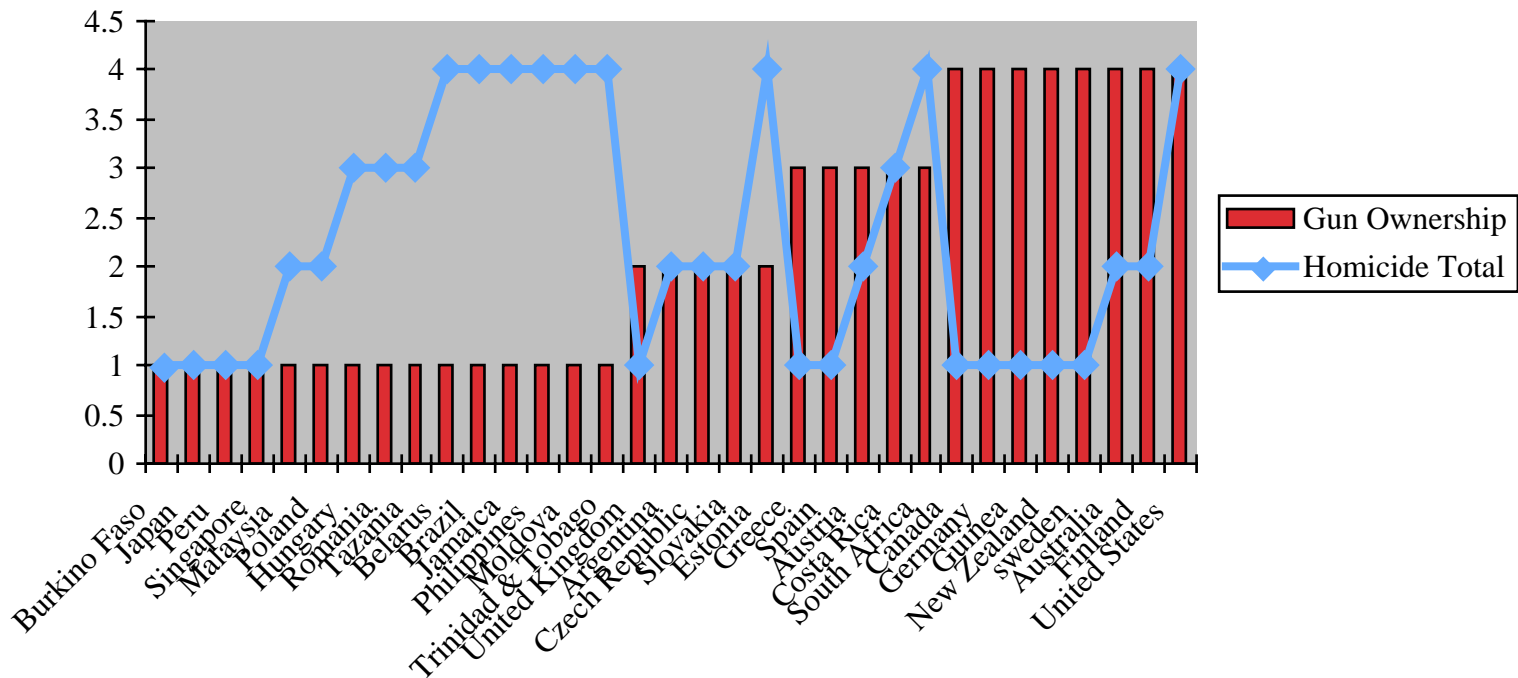
# The “weapon instrumentality” hypothesis

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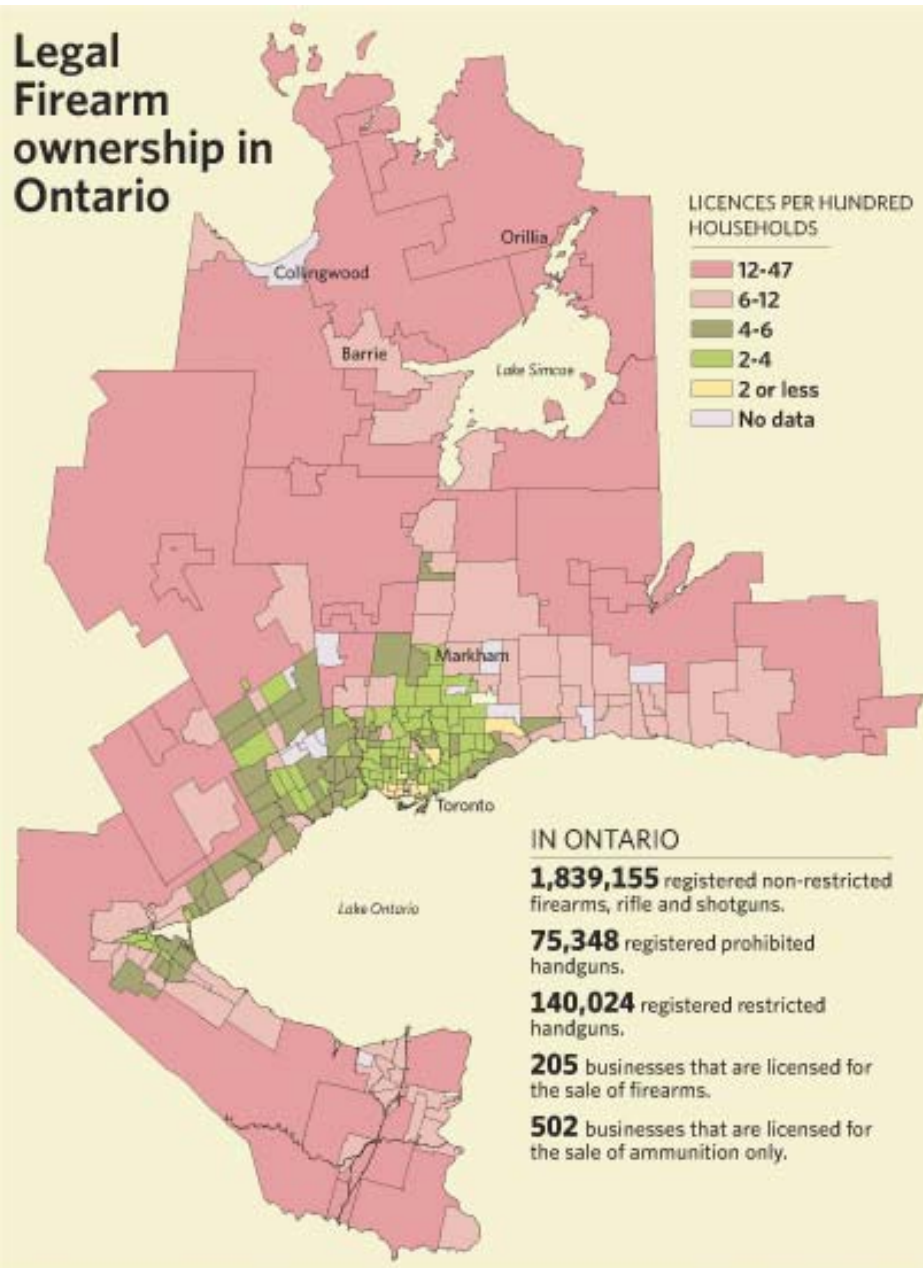
- The availability of firearms precipitates violence
  - Triggers pull fingers
- Availability increases the likelihood of death or serious injury
  - In assault
  - In robbery
  - In suicide

# Homicide Rates and Gun Ownership



Source: Report to the Secretary General of the United Nations (7-3-1997),  
from Greenwood (2000)

# Legal Firearm ownership in Ontario



# Problems with “instrumentality” hypothesis

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- Confuses deadliness of instrument with intentions of assailant
- Many alternative deadly weapons available
- Assaults involving firearms cause fewer injuries -- and less serious injuries

# Injuries During Assault



	Gun	Knife	Club
Major injuries	6%	11%	14%
Minor injuries	40%	40%	60%
No injuries	52%	47%	24%
Unknown	2%	2%	2%
No incidents	812	5,760	5,432



# Do restrictive gun laws create a safer society?

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- The goals of the firearm registry are:
  - To cut firearms violence
  - To reduce domestic violence
  - To cut total homicide
  - To reduce violent crime
  - To improve public safety
- Allan Rock, addressing Parliament, Feb 16 & June 13, 1995

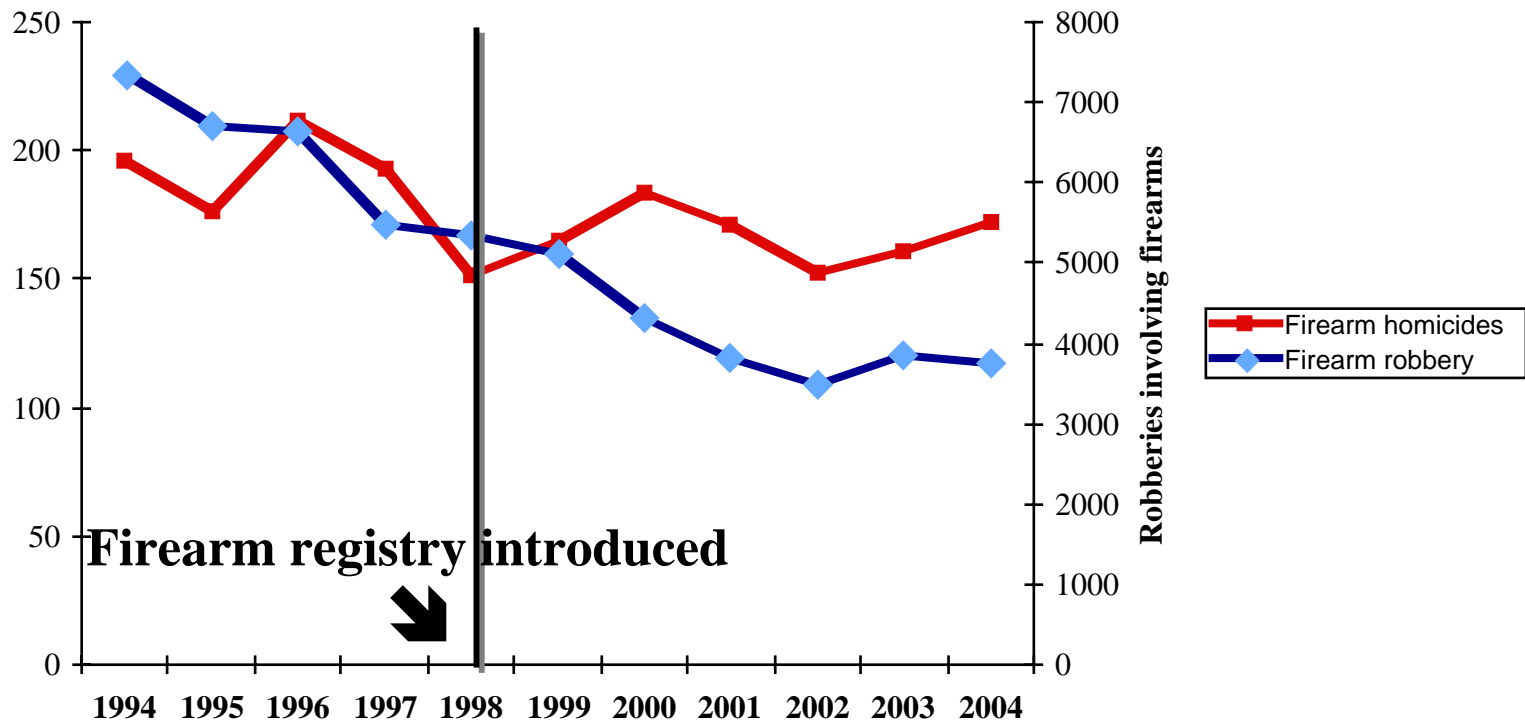
# How can we measure improvements in public safety?

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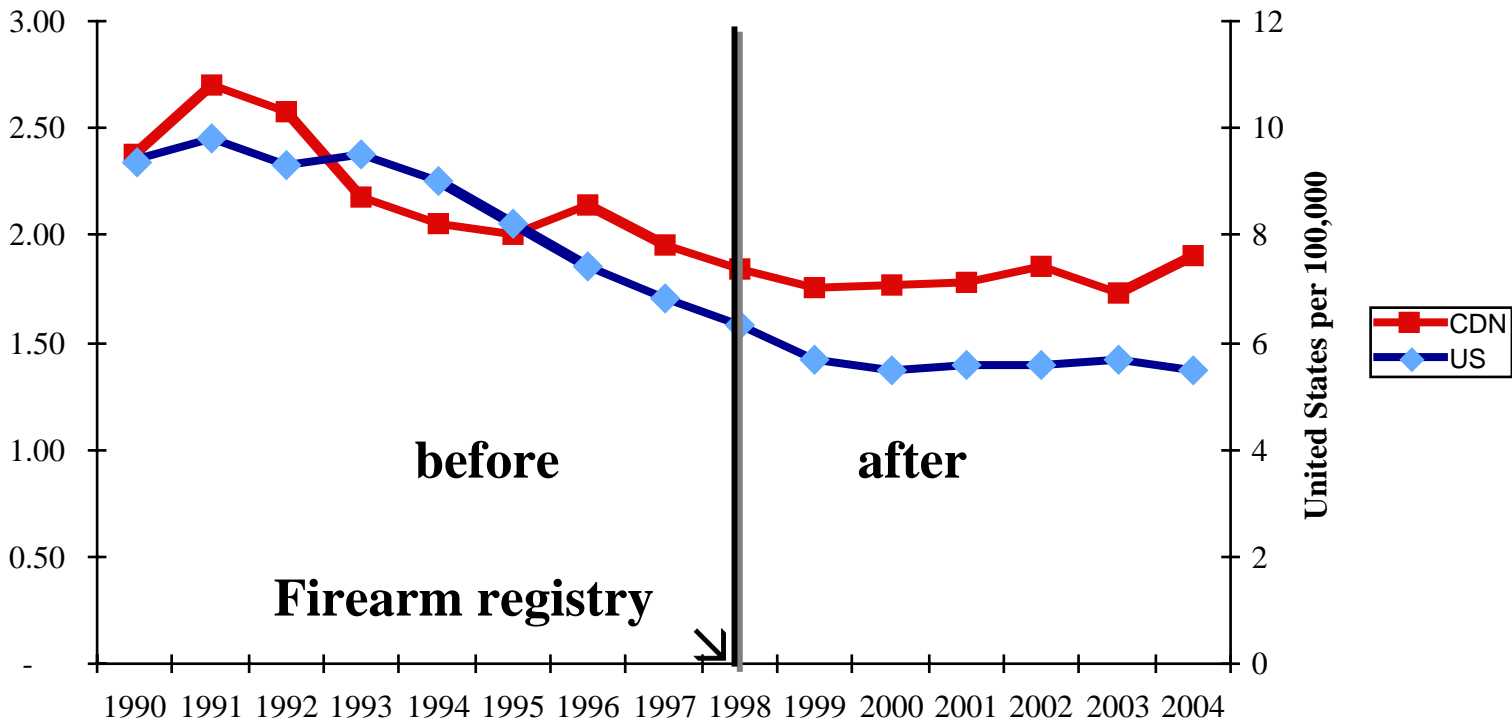
- Criminal violence involving guns should fall
- Violent crime rates should fall
  
- Homicide rates should fall
- Gun homicide should fall
  
- Suicide rates should fall

# Gun crime has declined, but not gun homicide



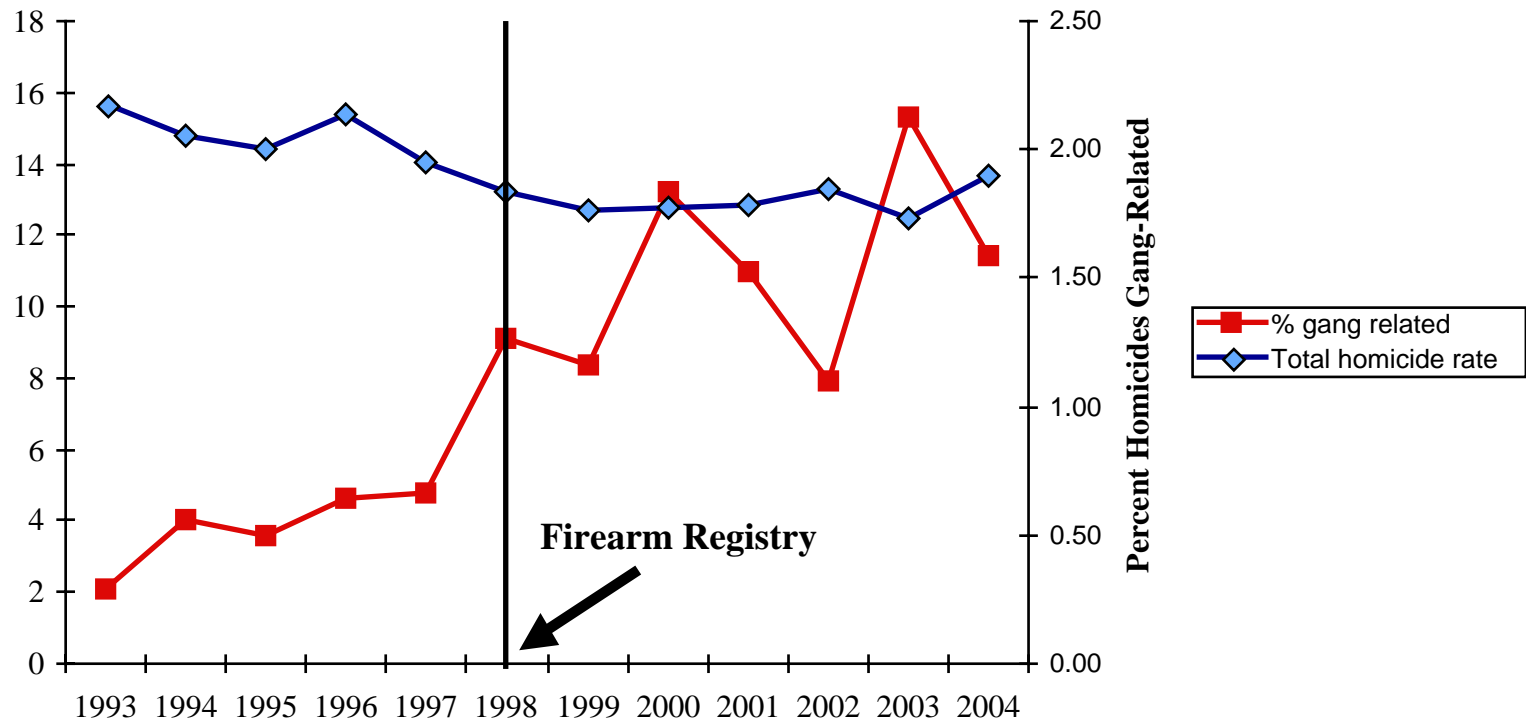
Source: Juristat, Crime Statistics in Canada, 2004

# Homicide stable since 1998



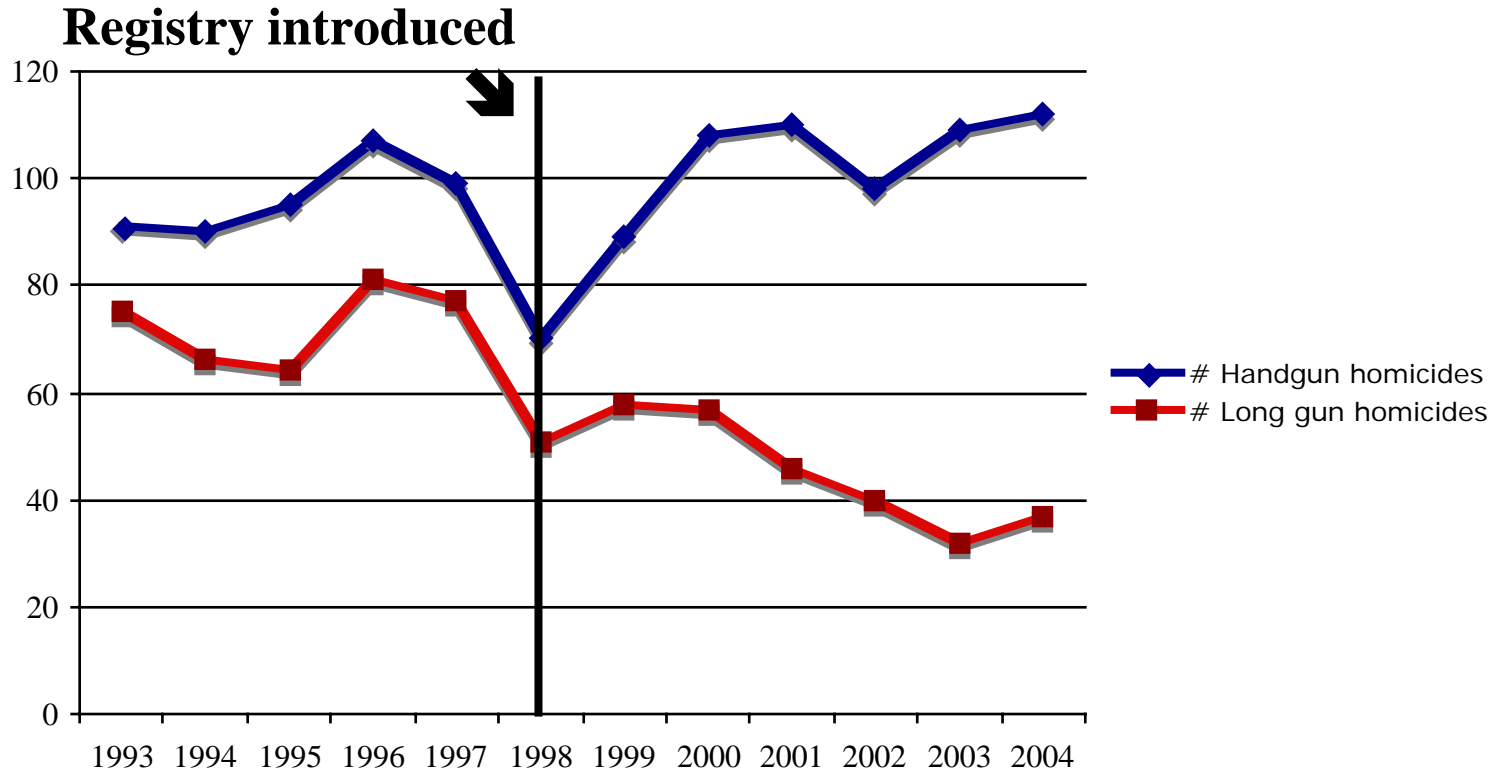
Source: FBI and Juristat

# Gang-related homicides



Source: Dauvergne, Homicide in Canada, 2004

# Handgun homicides have increased

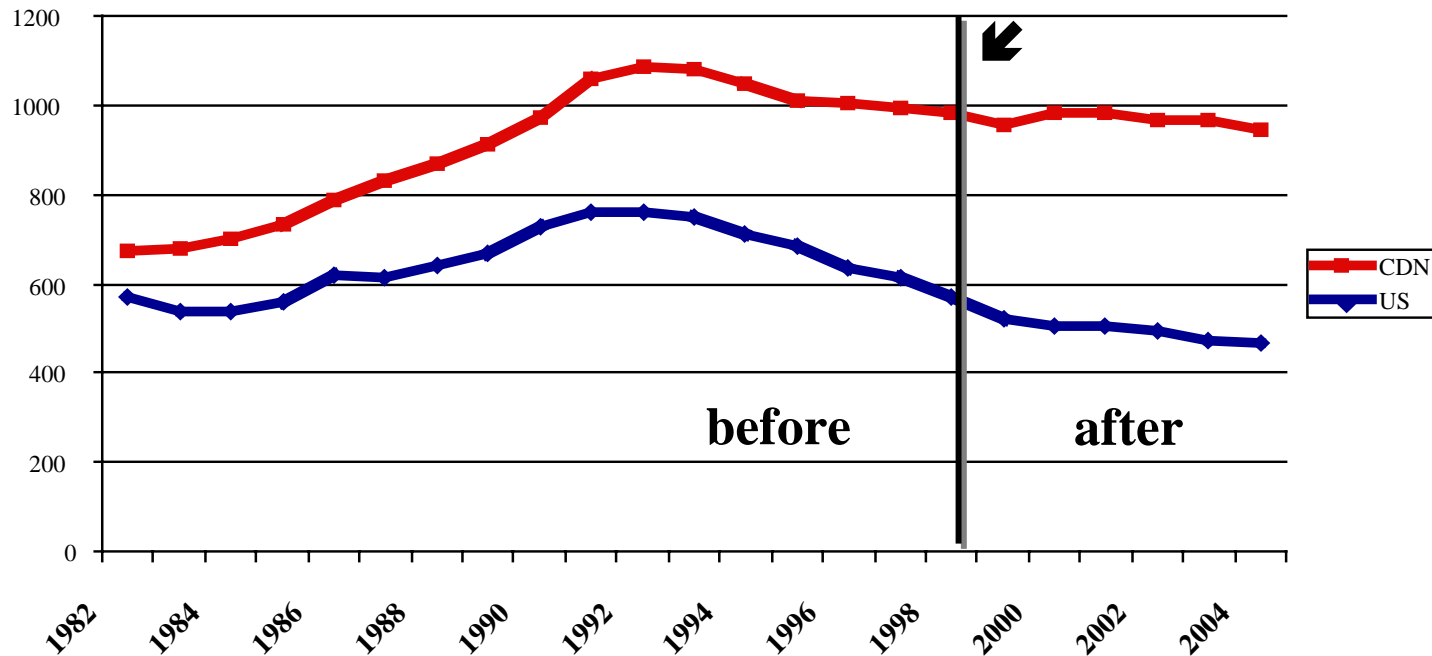


Source: Jursitat, Stats Can

# Violent Crime Stable

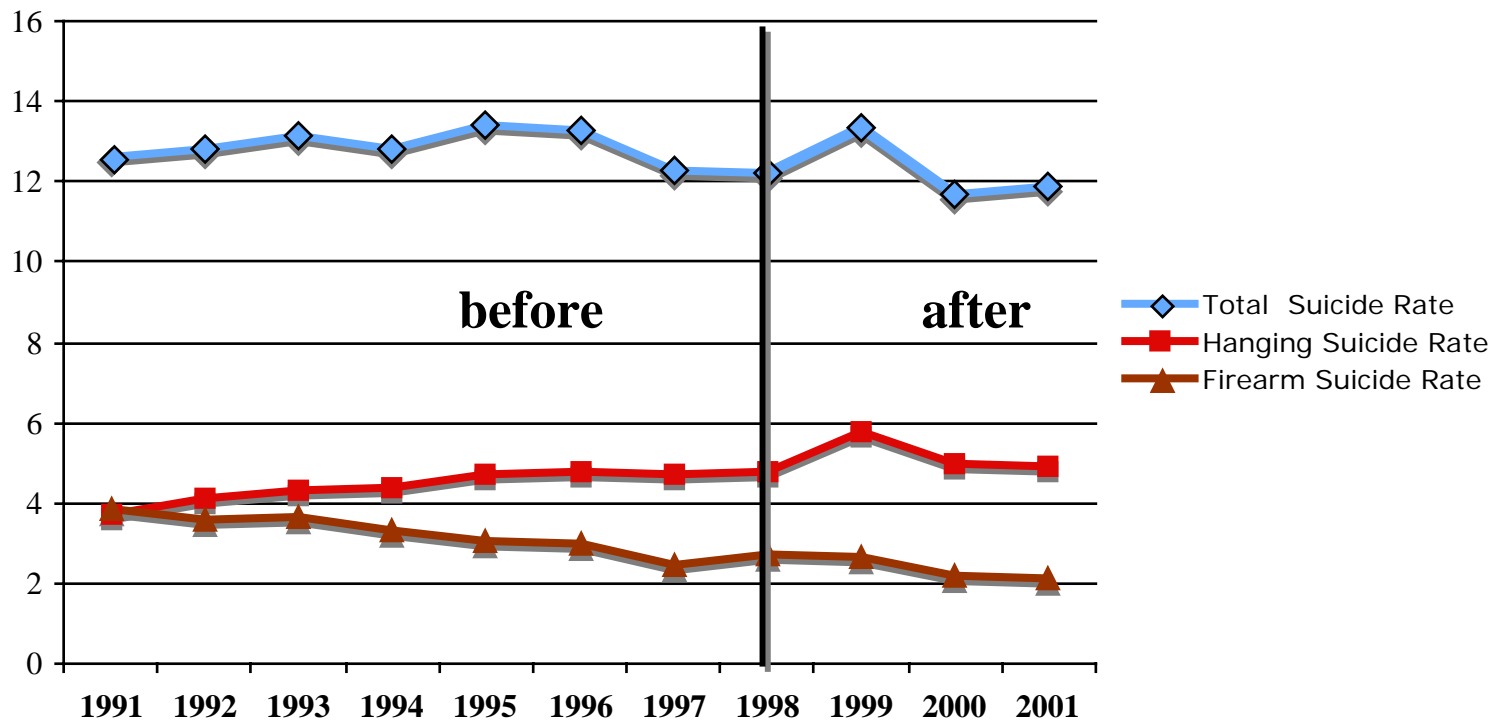


## Firearm Registry Introduced



Source: FBI and Juristat

# Total Suicides Stable



Source: Statistics Canada



## Since 1998



- 
- Homicide rates have **increased** by 3%
  - Gang-related homicides **increased** five fold
  - Percent gun-related homicide **unchanged**
  - Violent crime rates have **decreased** by 4%
  - Suicide rates have **decreased** by 2%
- 
- Registry not linked with these small changes

# Firearms Registry



- 
- **2 million licensed owners**
    - 1.3 million POLs have not had police checks
  - **3 - 5 million firearm owners [est]**
  
  - **7.1 million firearms registered**
    - 5.8 million firearm registrations not verified
  - **12 - 15 million firearms [est]**

# Summary Evaluation

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- Total costs exceeded \$1 billion in 2005
  - Originally estimated to cost \$2 million
- Corruption investigations continuing
- Incomplete coverage [est approx 50%]
- High percentage of error and omissions
- No demonstrable effect on public safety

# What went wrong?

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- The Canadian government made two mistakes:
  - Trusted public health advocates
  - Ignored the experiences of other countries with firearm registration

# Problems with the public health approach

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- Unscientific and moralistic
- Greatly exaggerate the dangers of ordinary gun owners
- Advocates are radicals in sheep's clothing

# Advocacy, not science

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- Public health studies often violate scientific rules
- Ad hominem arguments
- Disconfirming studies ignored
- Results over-interpreted
- False citations of prior research
- Papers often published without proper peer review

# Advocacy, not science

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- Public health studies rely upon misleading measure like “gun deaths”
- Conduct cost-benefit studies but ignore benefits
- Public health studies oversimplify the epidemiological model

# Defending the firearm registry

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- Used frequently by “public safety officers”
  - 6,500 queries daily over last quarter
  - 5.7 million times since Dec 1/1998
- Used for 762 affidavits that allowed police to obtain search or arrest warrants or were used as evidence in court cases (Jan - March 2006)



# Critique of defense



- 
- Claim: Registry used frequently
    - Activity is not a measure of effectiveness
    - The bulk of ‘uses’ are automatic or maintenance
  - Claim: Many affidavits prepared
    - Legitimate or over-reaction?
    - Scofflaws or dangerous people?
    - Arresting owners for unsafe storage or criminals for theft?

# Defending the firearm registry

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- Police investigations aided by information from gun registry
- Allows police to know where the guns are
- Gun deaths have declined

# Critique of defense



- 
- Claim: investigations aided by registry
    - Not critical to solving a single violent crime
  - Claim: Know where the guns are -
    - RCMP does not trust information in registry
    - Many errors and omissions
    - Approximately 50% of owners not in registry
  - Claim: Gun deaths declined --
    - but no lives saved -- total homicides and suicides have not declined

# Source of 'crime guns'?

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- Police studies
- Statistics Canada
- 'lost or missing' government firearms

# Firearms used in homicide



- 
- Homicide Survey Project (CCJS)
    - 1,349 firearms-related homicides (1997-2004)

748 firearms registration status known

16% found in the registry

# A police study of 'crime guns'



- 
- Toronto Police Services (2004)
    - 123 guns identified as 'crime guns'
- 
- |     |                                 |
|-----|---------------------------------|
| 67% | origin impossible to determine  |
| 9%  | stolen from Canadian gun owners |
| 24% | smuggled from US                |

# Another study of ‘crime guns’



- 
- Toronto Police Services (2005)
    - 214 guns identified as ‘crime guns’
- 
- |     |                                 |
|-----|---------------------------------|
| 45% | origin impossible to determine  |
| 16% | stolen from Canadian gun owners |
| 38% | smuggled from US                |

# More studies of 'crime guns'



- 
- Toronto Police Annual Report (2001)  
2% stolen from Canadian gun owners
  - Peel Regional Police, Project Gun Runner (1993)  
14% stolen from Canadian gun owners



# How many 'crime guns' come from police/military?

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- 108 guns reported lost or missing by RCMP in 2003
- Over 400 guns reported lost or missing by Canadian military in 2002
- Police and military do not have to register their firearms
- Police and military do not have to report regularly lost/stolen guns to Parliament



# A natural quasi-experiment

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- The justice system in the United States has increasingly diverged from that in Britain and the Commonwealth:
  - Arrest/conviction rates higher in the US,
  - Sentencing/punishment more severe, and
  - Qualified citizens can legally carry concealed handguns.

# Please Note

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- To assess the effect of laws, we must compare **trends** across countries
- A direct comparison of nations is inappropriate
- Police statistics, despite their limitations, are the best international measure

# National differences have diverse causes

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- Demography -- e.g., age, race, culture
- National history
- Economic patterns
- Welfare systems
- Immigration patterns

# A comparison of crime trends in selected countries with the US

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- Australia, Great Britain and Canada introduced restrictive general firearms laws in the 1990s:
- The Republic of Ireland and Jamaica imposed more sweeping firearm bans in the 1970s:

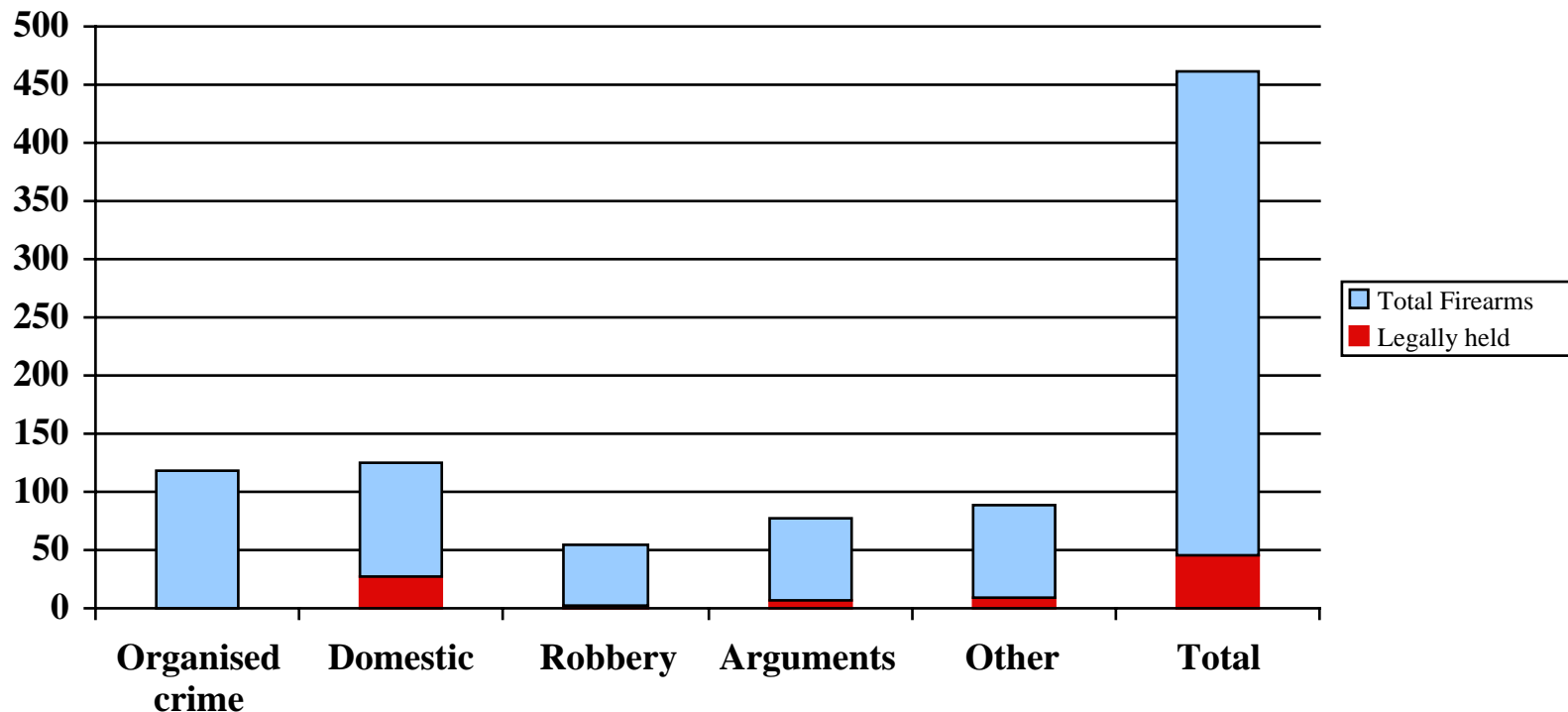
Great Britain

# Firearm laws have targeted legal owners



- 
- The Firearms Amendment of 1988 was brought in following the Hungerford incident
    - Brought in shotgun licences
  - The Firearms Amendment of 1997 was brought in after the Dunblane shooting
    - Prohibited and confiscated all legally-owned handguns

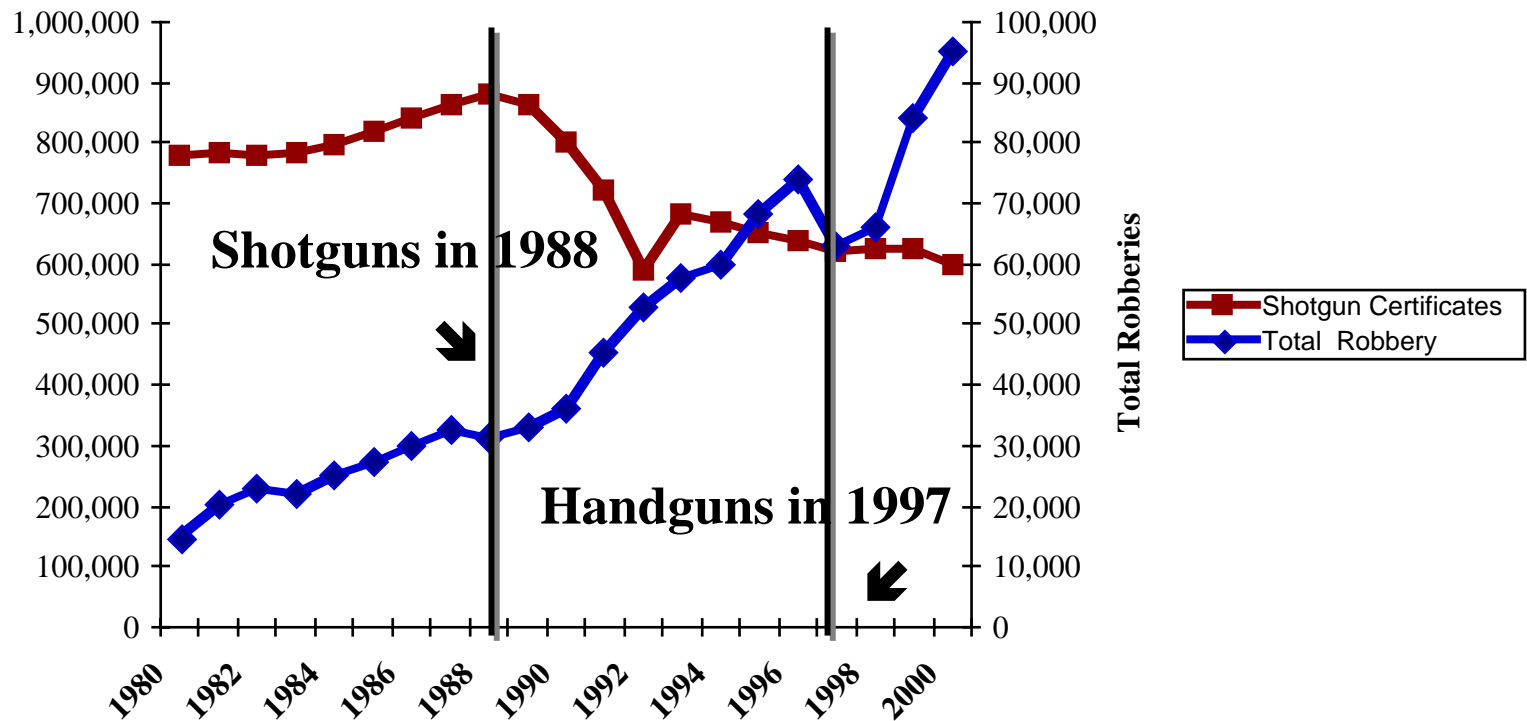
# Very few firearms used in homicide are legally held



Source: Criminal Statistics, E&W, 2000, T 3D



# Robbery increased but (legal) gun ownership decreased

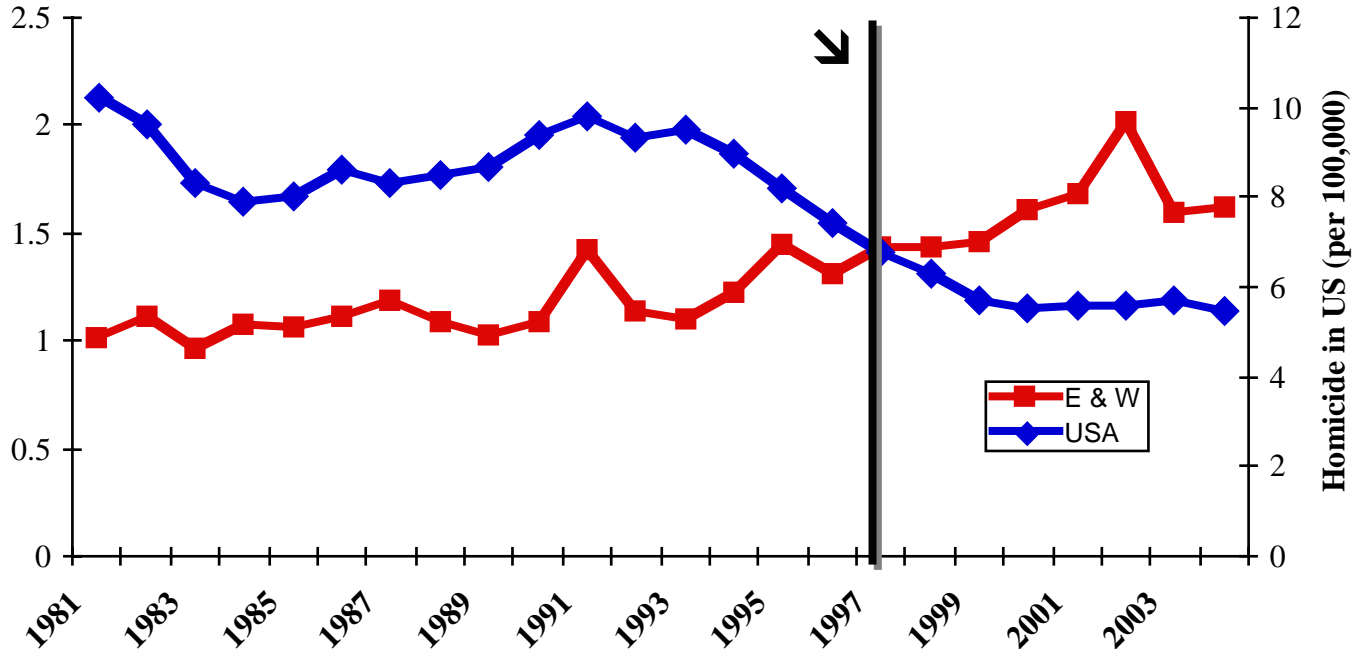


Source: Greenwood, 2001

# English homicide rates increased after 1997

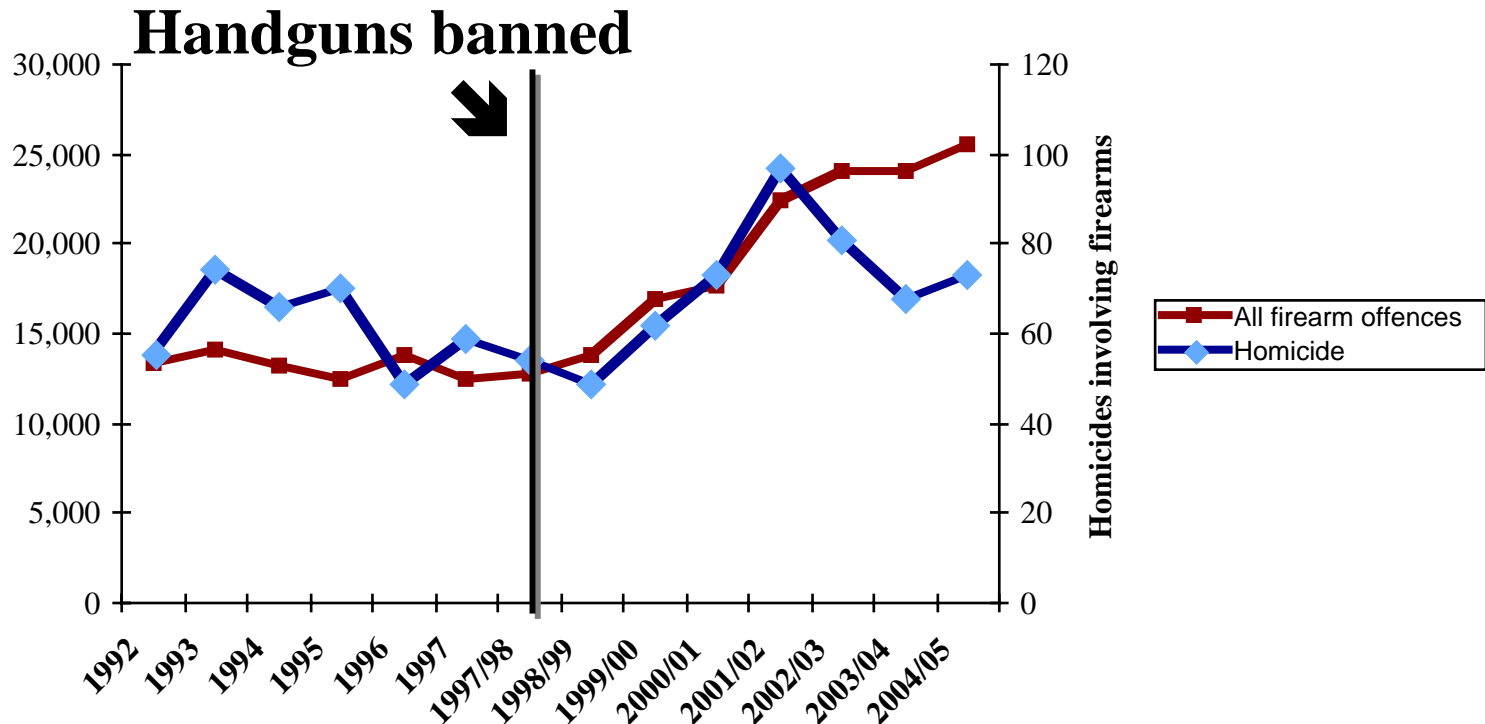


## Handguns banned in Britain in 1997



Source: FBI and Home Office

# Firearms violence in England increased

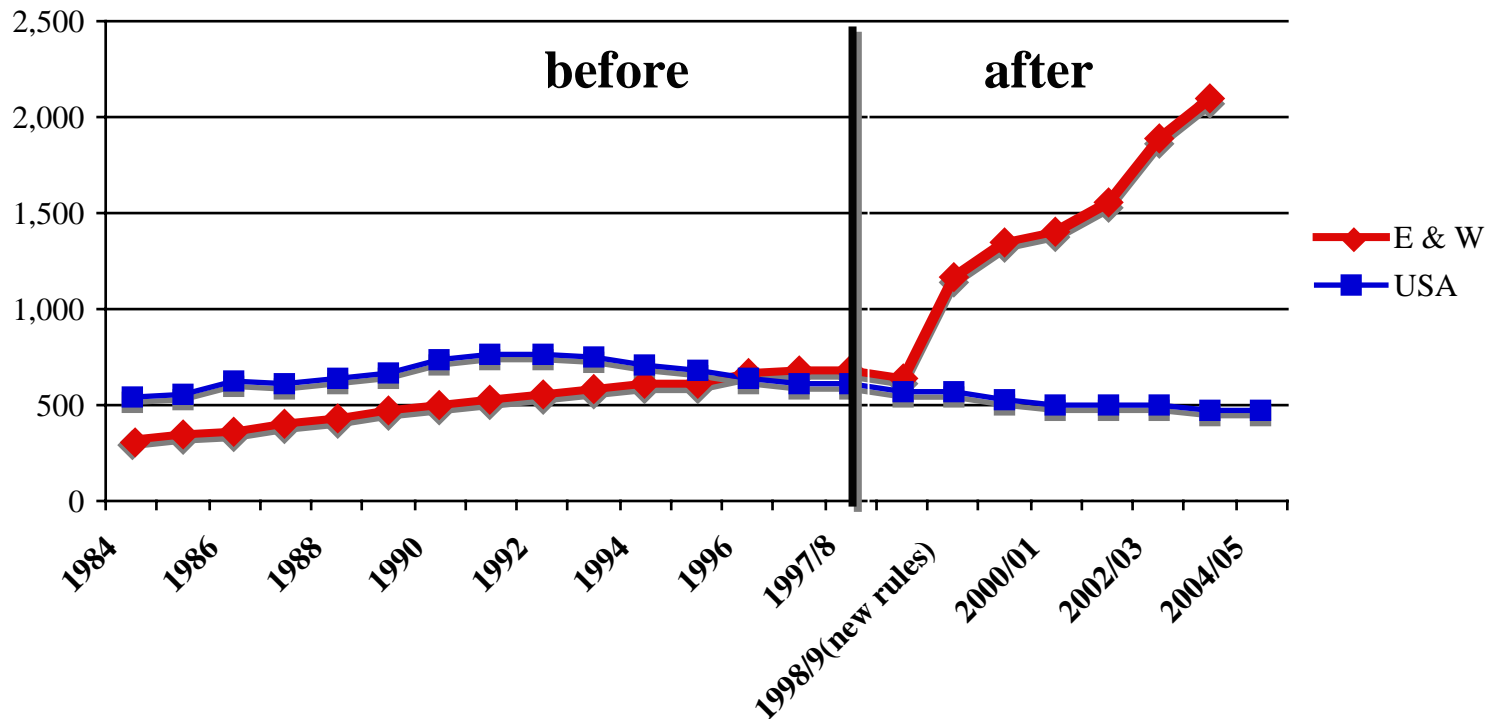


Source: Home Office, Crime in England 2003/04, Crime in England 2004/05

# Violent crime rate increased in England and Wales



Handguns banned in Britain in 1997



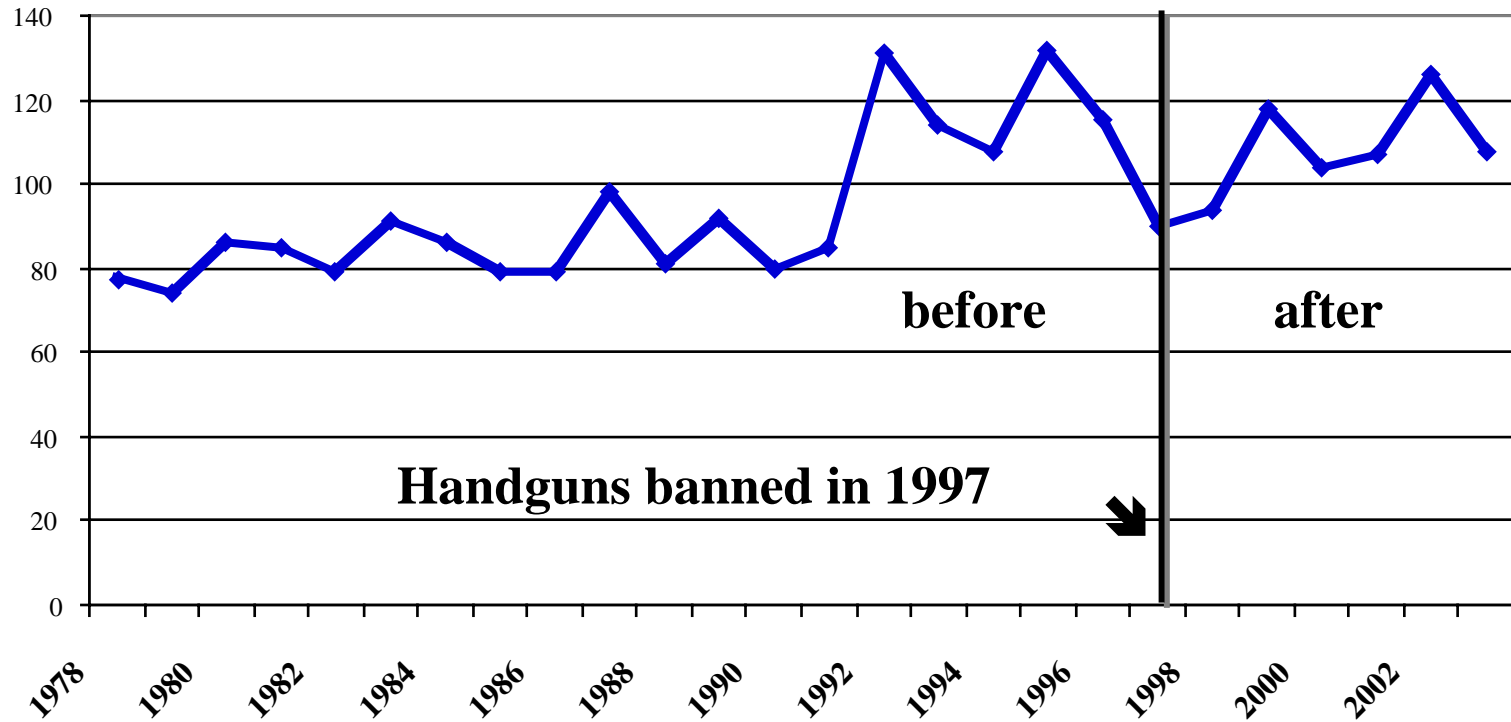
Sources: Home Office and FBI

# Comparing crime in England and US (2004)



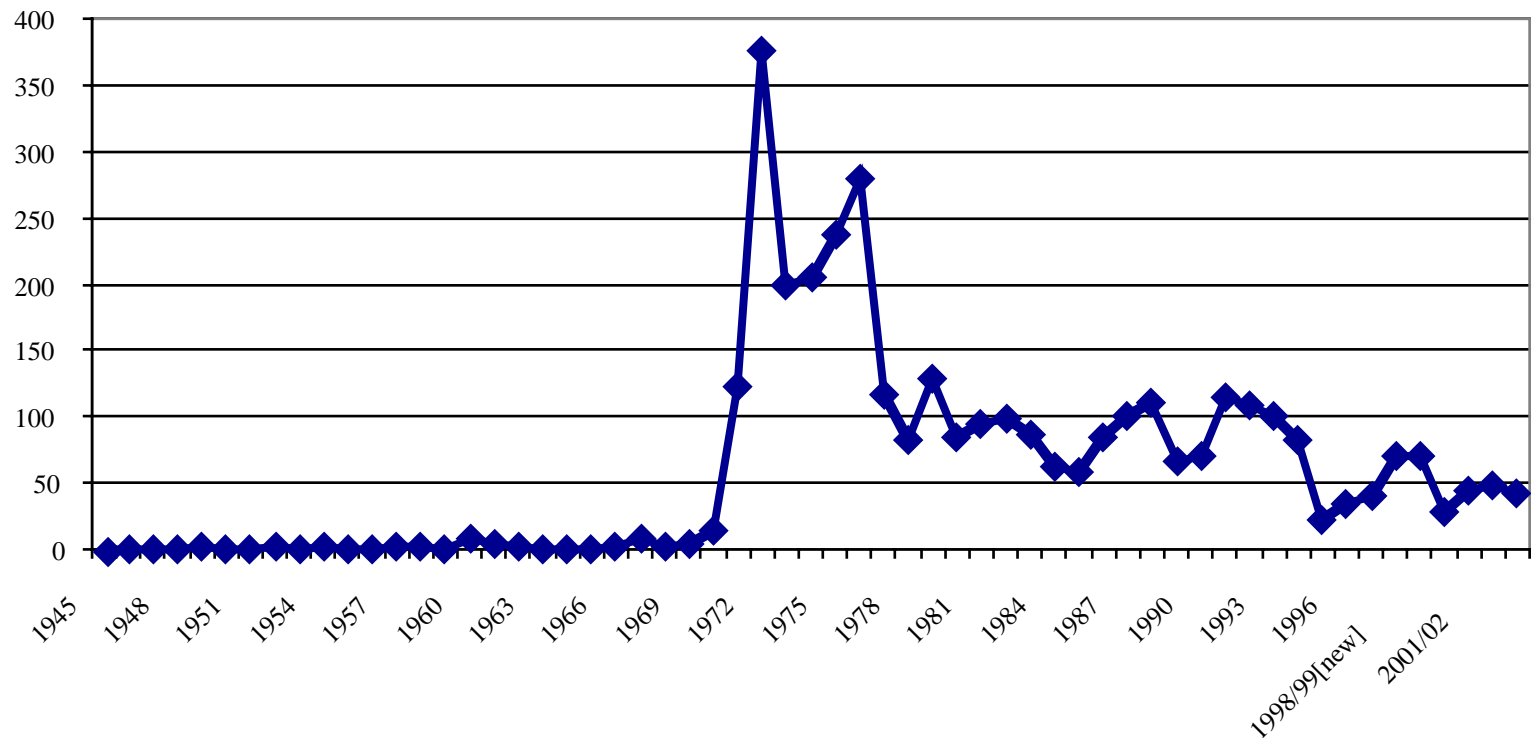
	England	United States
Homicide	1.6	5.5
Rape	26	32
Robbery	167	137
Assault	452	291
Motor Vehicle theft	435	421
Burglary	1,543	730

# No change in homicide in Scotland



Source: Scottish Executive

# Murder declined in Northern Ireland



Source: Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland, National Statistics

Australia



# Australian firearms legislation

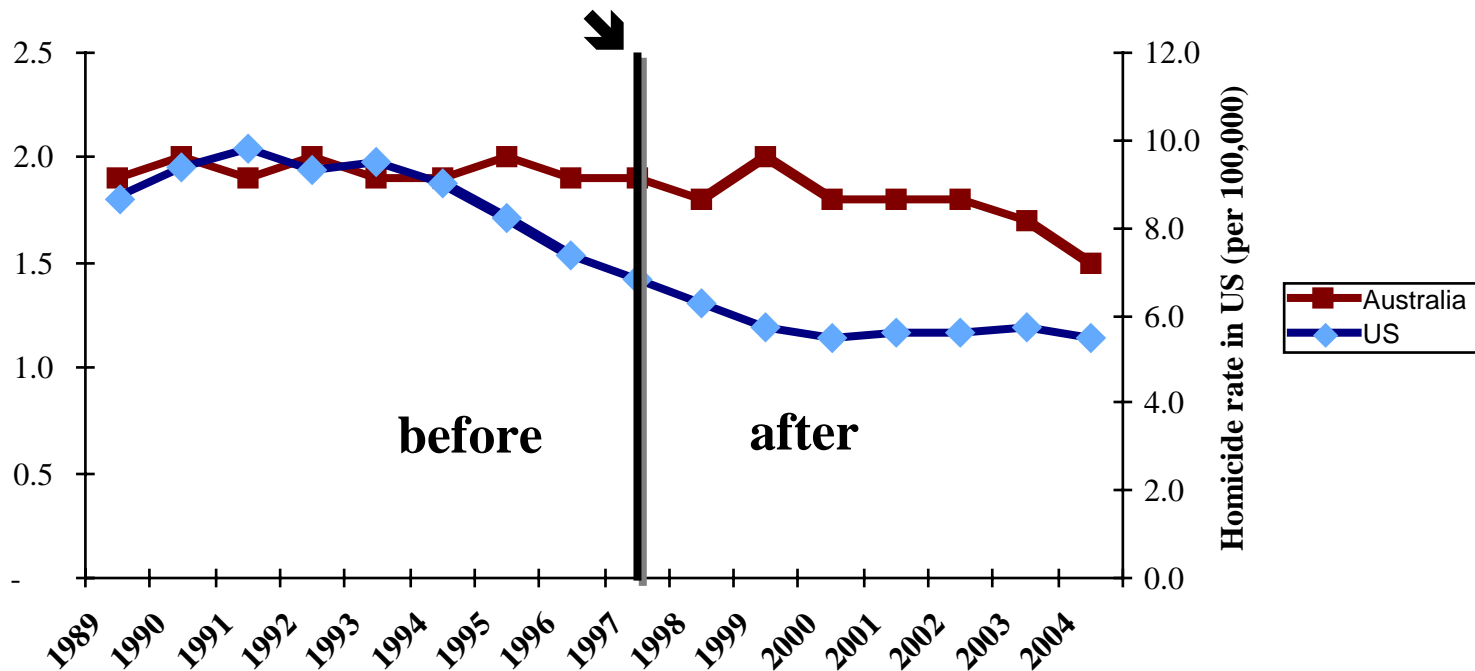


- 
- In 1997, government brought in sweeping firearms legislation following murders in Tasmania
  - Prohibited and confiscated semi-automatic long arms,
  - Introduced strict new licensing and registration regulations

# Little change in homicide immediately following 1997



## 1997 Australian Firearms Laws

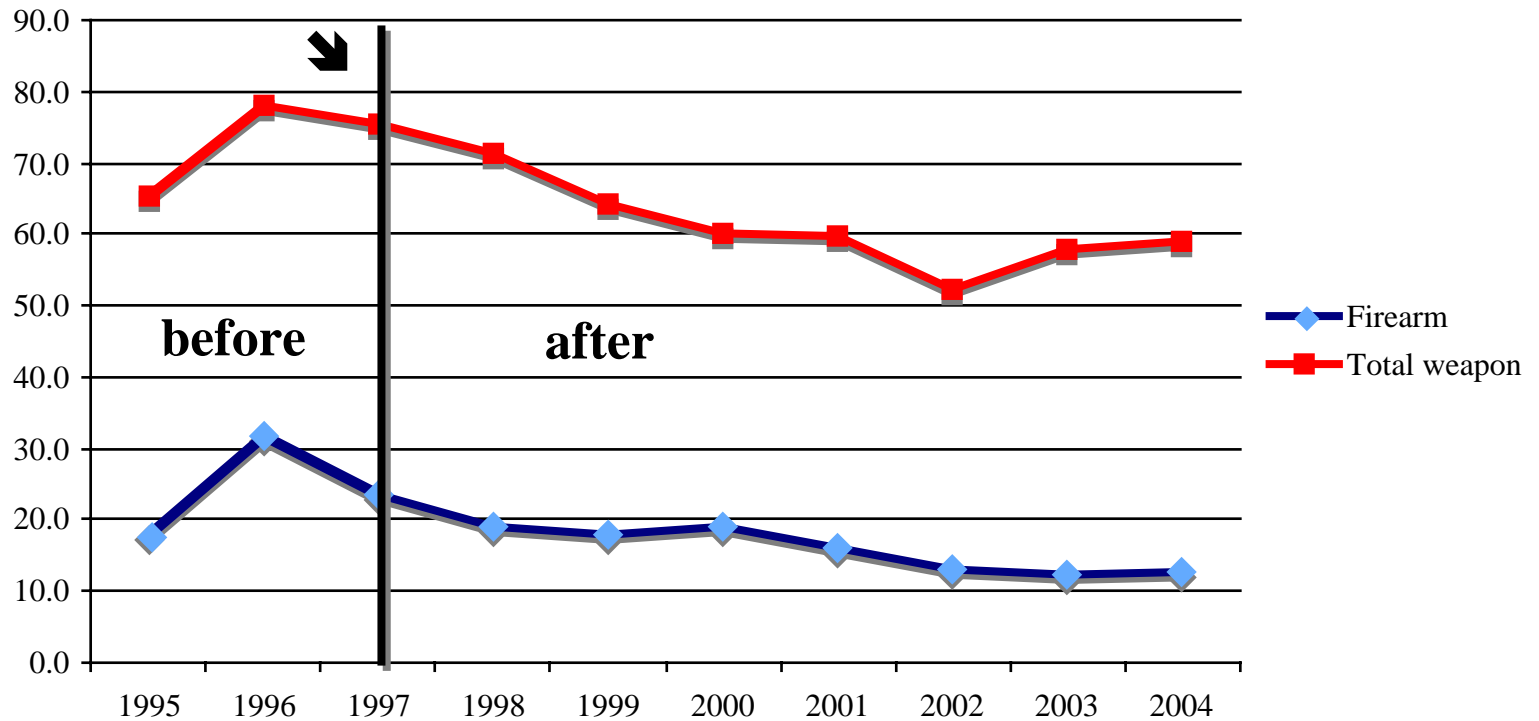


Source: FBI and AIC

# Firearms use in homicide declined following 1997



## 1997 Australian Firearms Laws

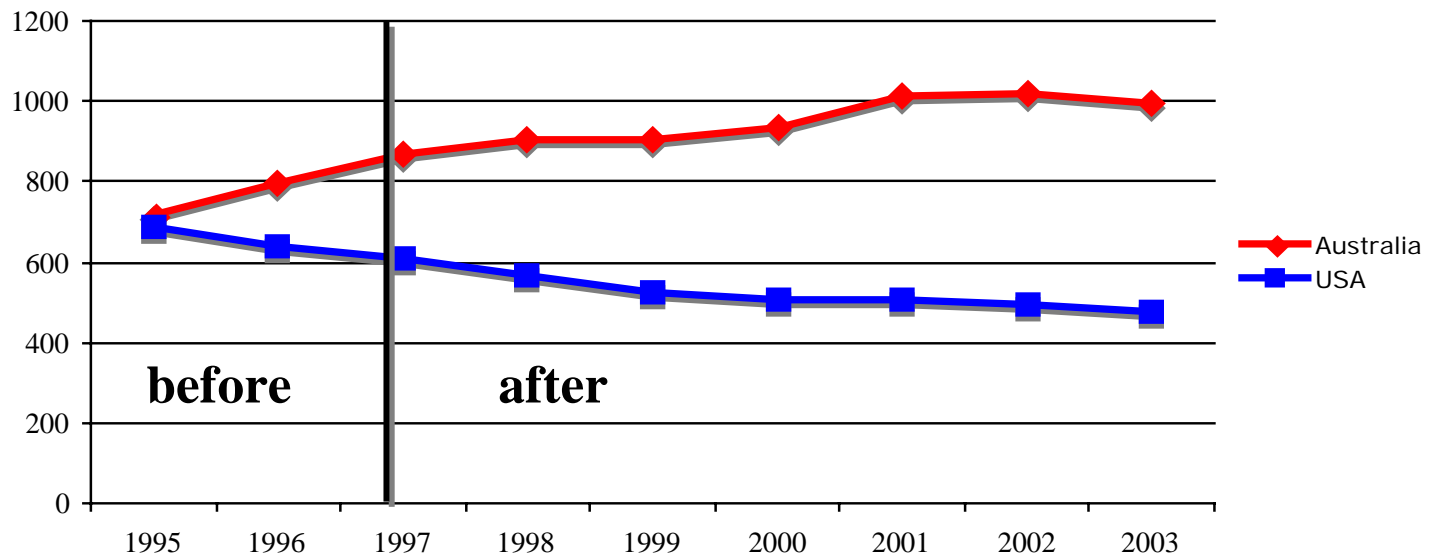


Source: ABS 4510.0 2005

# Violent crime continued to increase in Australia after 1997 firearms laws



## Violent Crime Trends in Australia and the USA

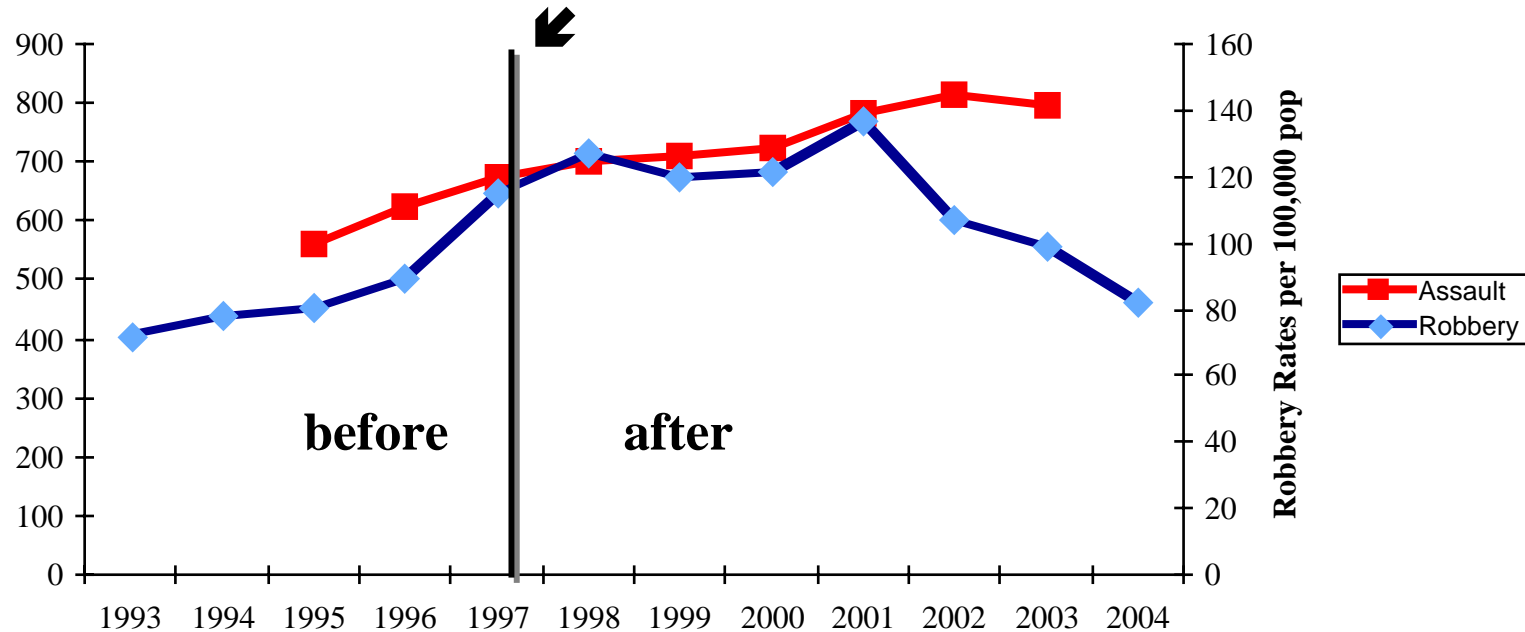


Source: ABS 4510.0 and FBI UCR Reports

# Assault rates and robbery rates both rose in Australia after 1997



## Australian Gun Laws Introduced in 1997



Sources: ABS Cat 4510.0 and FBI UCR Reports

# The Republic of Ireland

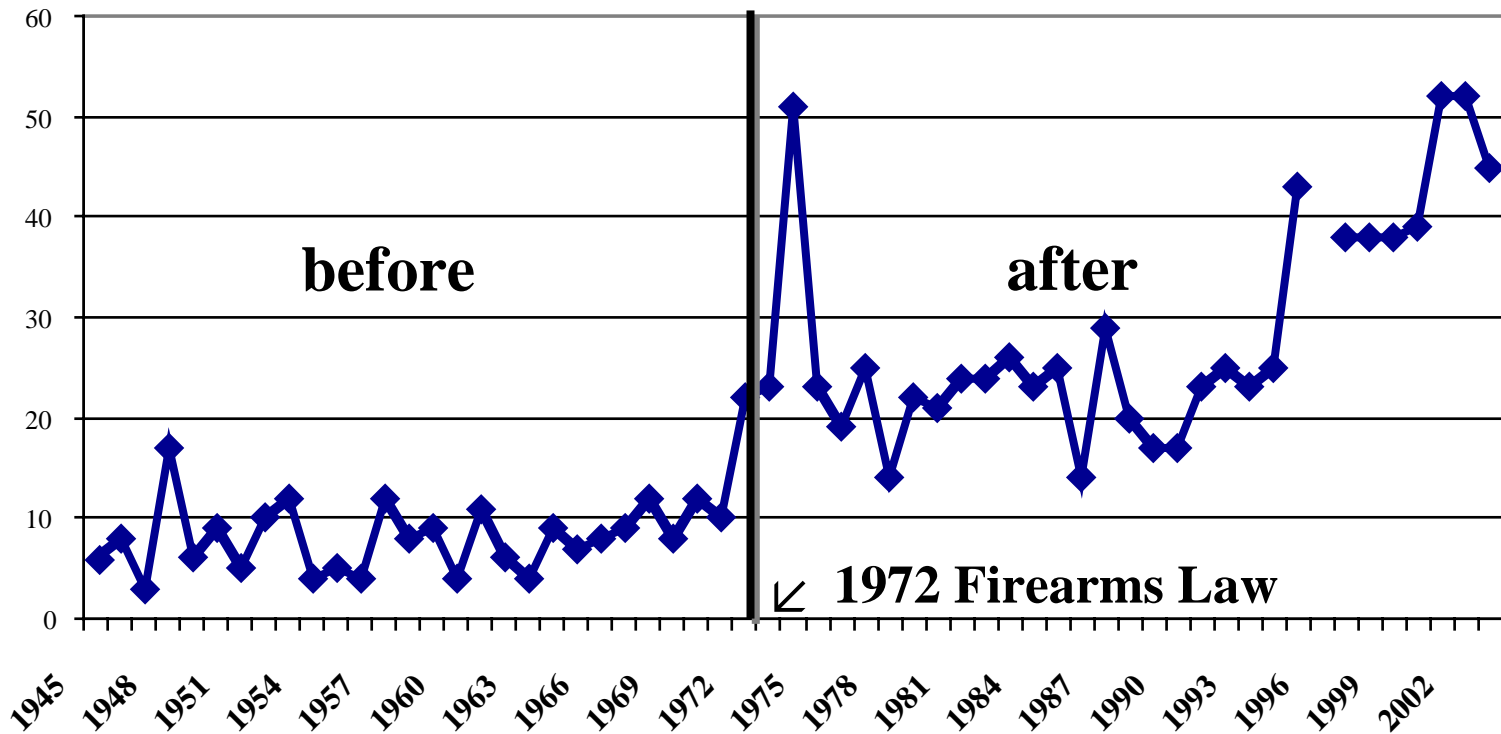
Gun prohibition and terrorism

# Irish Gun Law



- 
- Firearms prohibited and confiscated in 1972
  - Motivated primarily by a concern with terrorism (IRA)

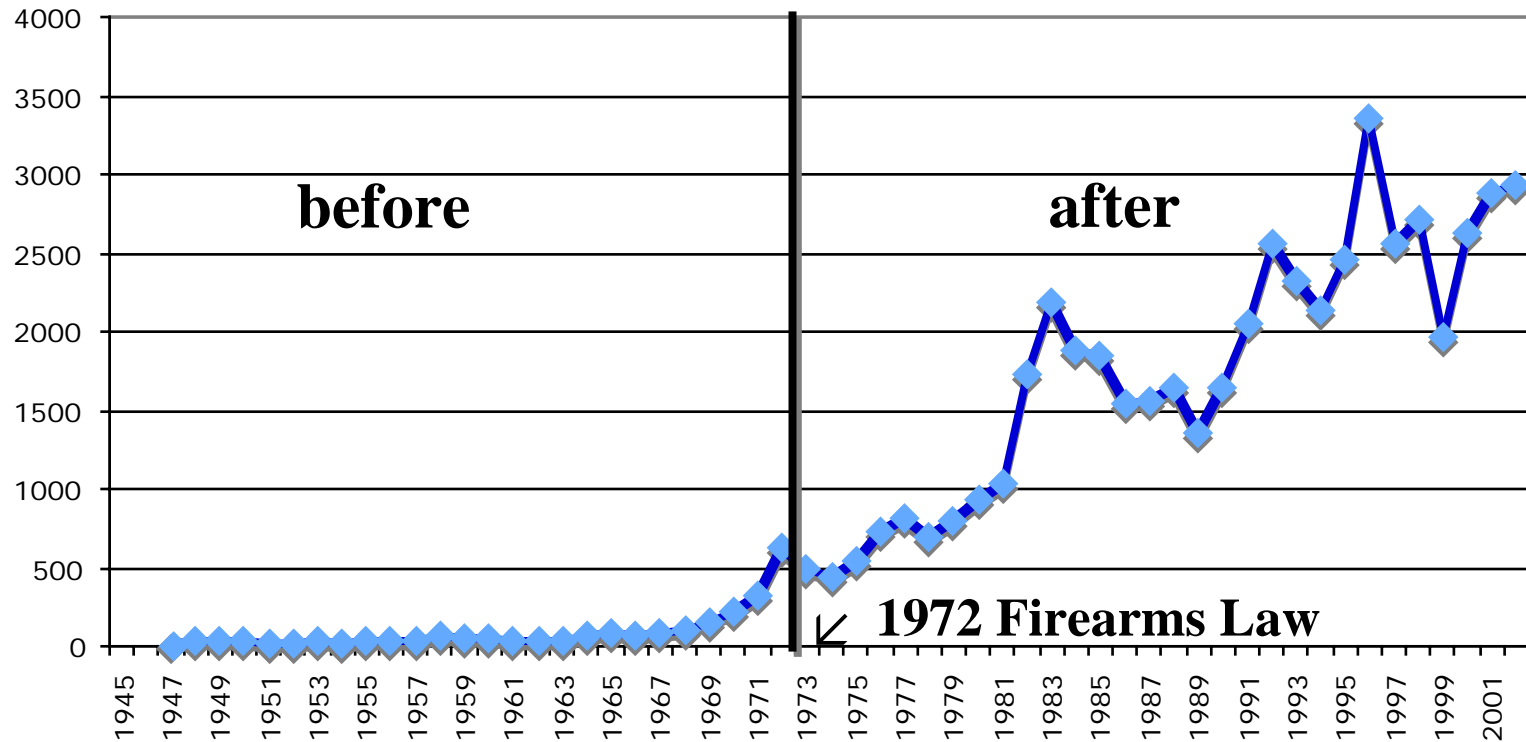
# Murders continued to increase in Ireland



Source: Garda Stochana Annual Reports



# Robberies increased in Republic of Ireland



Sources: Brewer, Interpol, Garda Stochana

# Jamaica

The Gun Court and Drug Violence

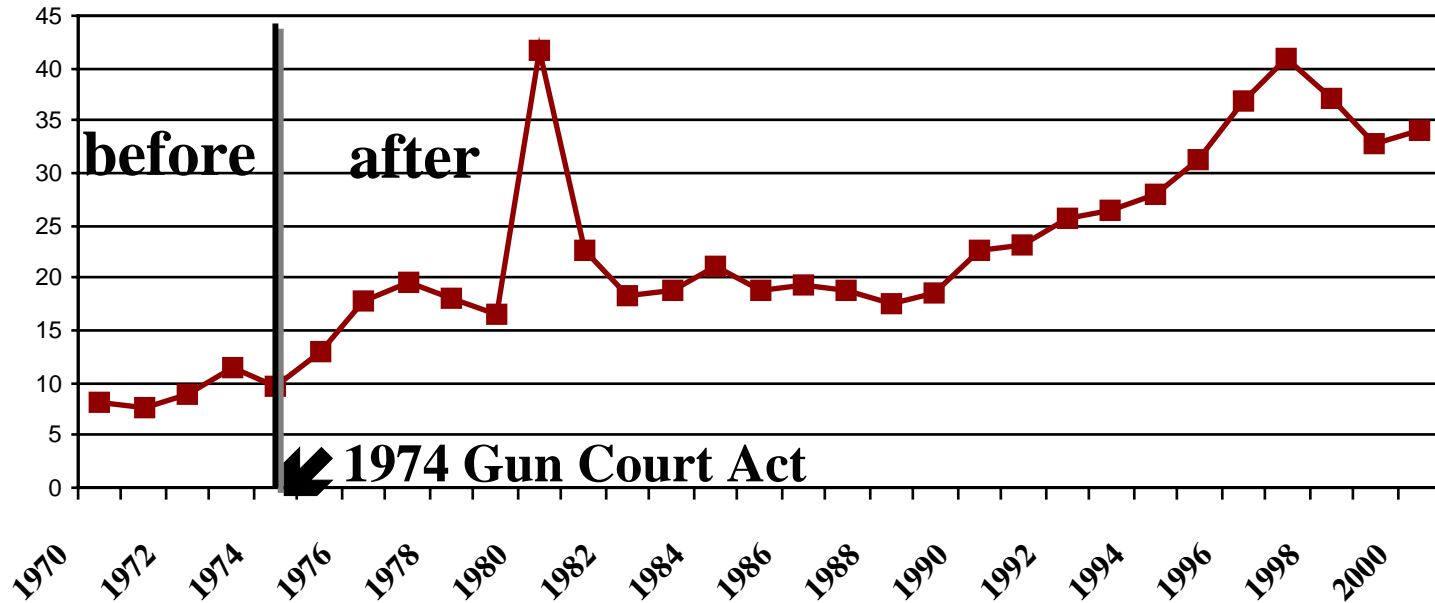
# Jamaican Gun Laws



- 
- Gun court (1974 - 1982)
    - Firearms and ammunition prohibited
    - Mandatory life sentences
    - No bail, no jury trials for suspects accused of possessing firearms or ammunition,
  - Firearm ownership still very tightly controlled

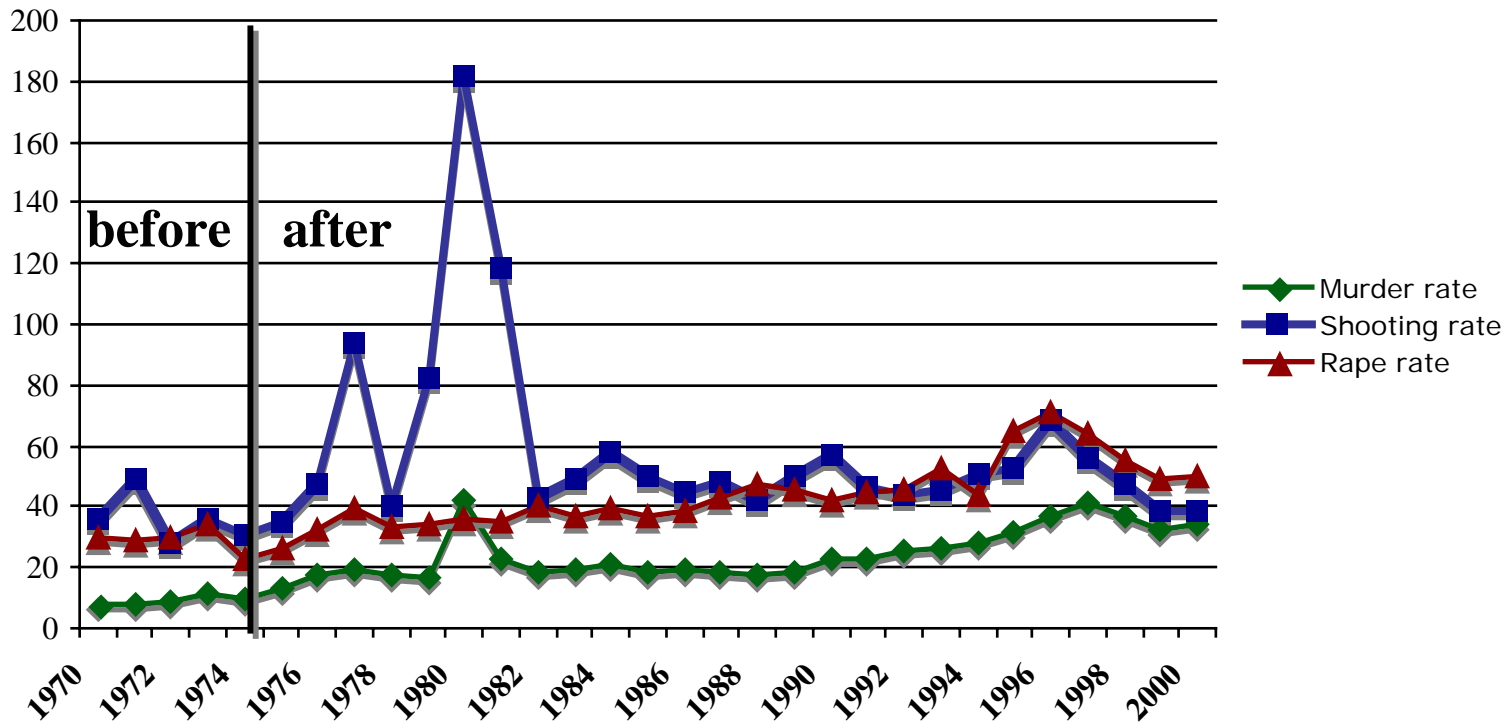


# Murders continued to increase



Source: Professor A. Francis, University West Indies

# Trends in Jamaican criminal violence

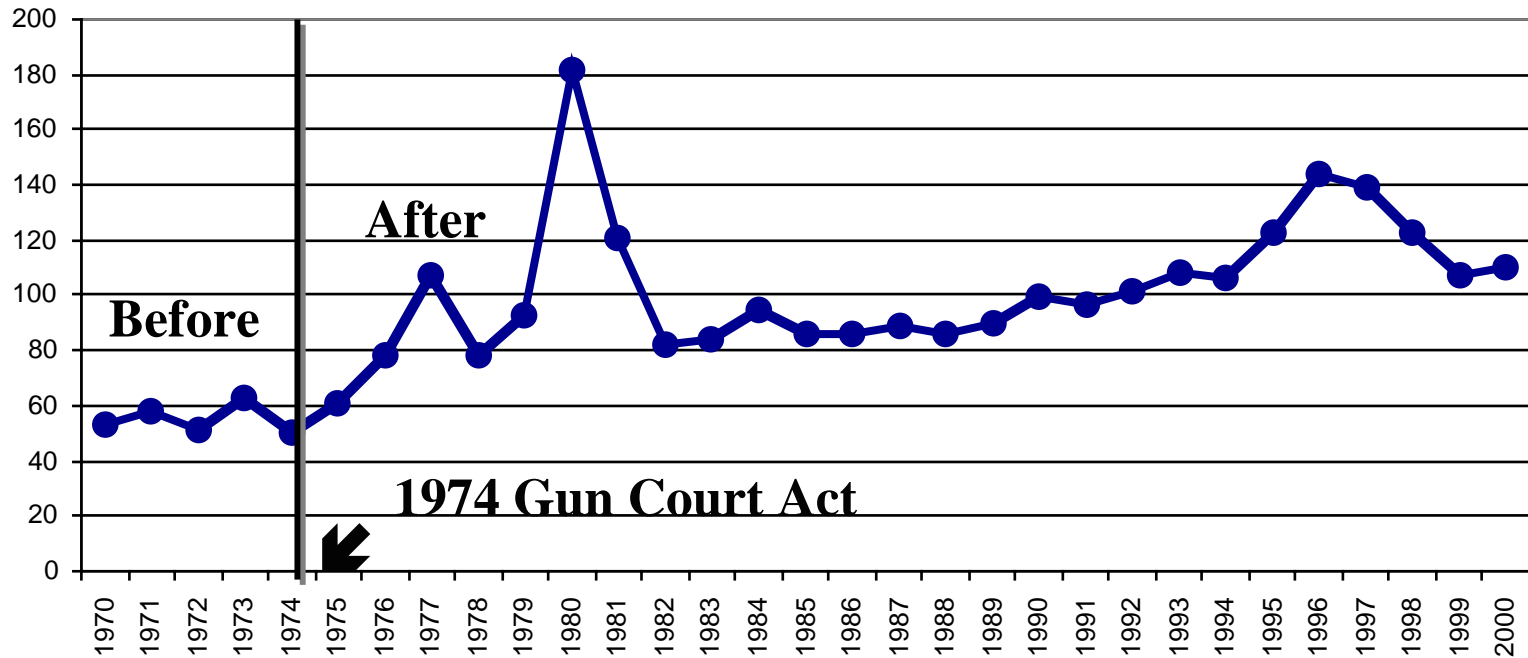


Source: Professor A. Francis, University West Indies

# Violent crime continued to increase



Violent Crime Index for Jamaica (1970-2000)



Source: Professor A. Francis, University West Indies

# Summary

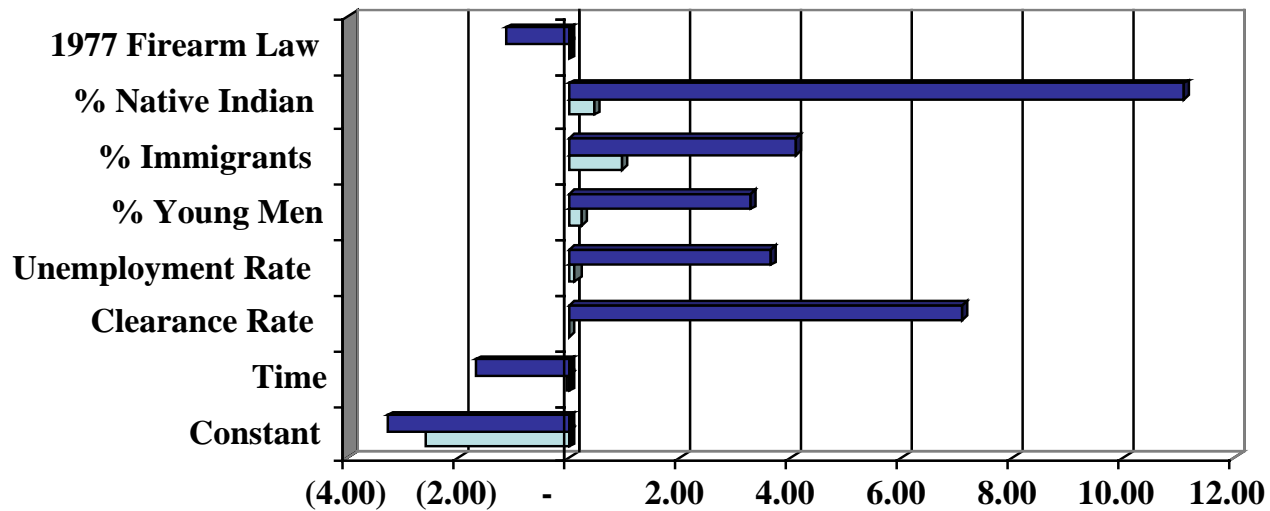


- 
- No strong evidence that restrictive firearm regulations have reduced violent crime or homicide rates in Canada, Australia, Great Britain, Jamaica, or the Republic of Ireland
  - In contrast, the United States has witnessed a dramatic drop in criminal violence

Econometric analyses of  
the 1977 and 1991 Canadian  
firearm laws

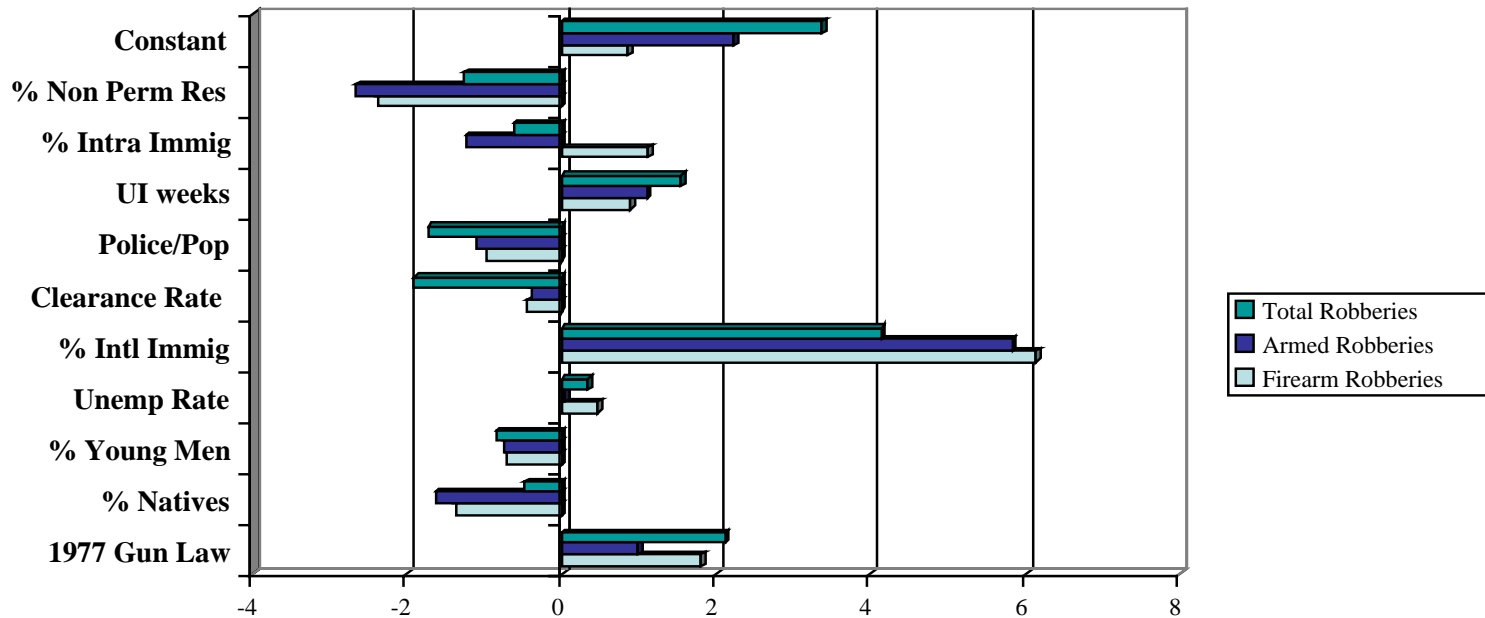


# Evaluating the 1977 Firearms Law: Homicide



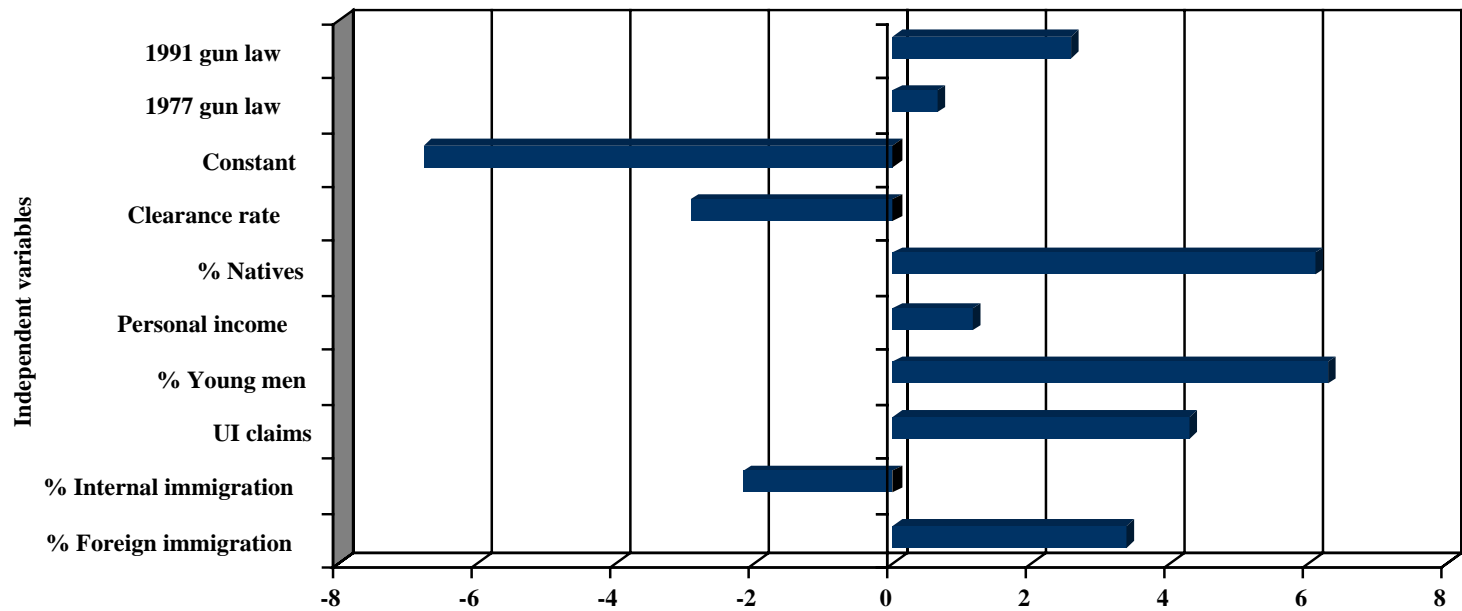
Source: Mauser and Holmes (1992)

# Evaluating the 1977 Firearms Law: Robbery



Source: Mauser and Maki (2003)

# Evaluating the 1991 and 1977 Firearms Law: Robbery



Source: Mauser and Maki (2002)  
t-ratios greater than  $\pm 2$  are significant

# Summary



- 
- No significant negative effect found for firearms laws on crime rates
  - Factors found with significant effects:
    - Clearance rate
    - Percent young men in a province
    - Percent Native Indian
    - Immigration
    - Unemployment rates

# Research on the effectiveness of gun laws

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- Centers for Disease Control, **First Reports Evaluating the Effectiveness of Strategies for Preventing Violence: Firearms Laws**. October 2003.
- Jacobs, James, **Can Gun Control Work?** Oxford, 2002
- Kleck, Gary. **Targeting Guns, Firearms and Their Control**. New York, Aldine de Gruyter. 1997.
- National Academy of Science, National Research Council, **Firearms and Violence: A Critical Review**, Dec. 2004.

# Why is violent crime stable in Canada?

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- High recidivism rates
  - 68% of accused adult murderers known to have a criminal record
  - 54% of accused youth murderers known to have a criminal record
- Insufficient jail time
- Insufficient numbers of police officers

# Punishment too lenient



- 
- Prison sentence length
    - 57% 1 month or less
    - 21% >1 to <3 months
    - 10% >3 to < 6 months
    - 5% >6 to <12 months
    - 3% >1 to < 2 years
    - 4% 2 years or more
  - Of all custodial sentences

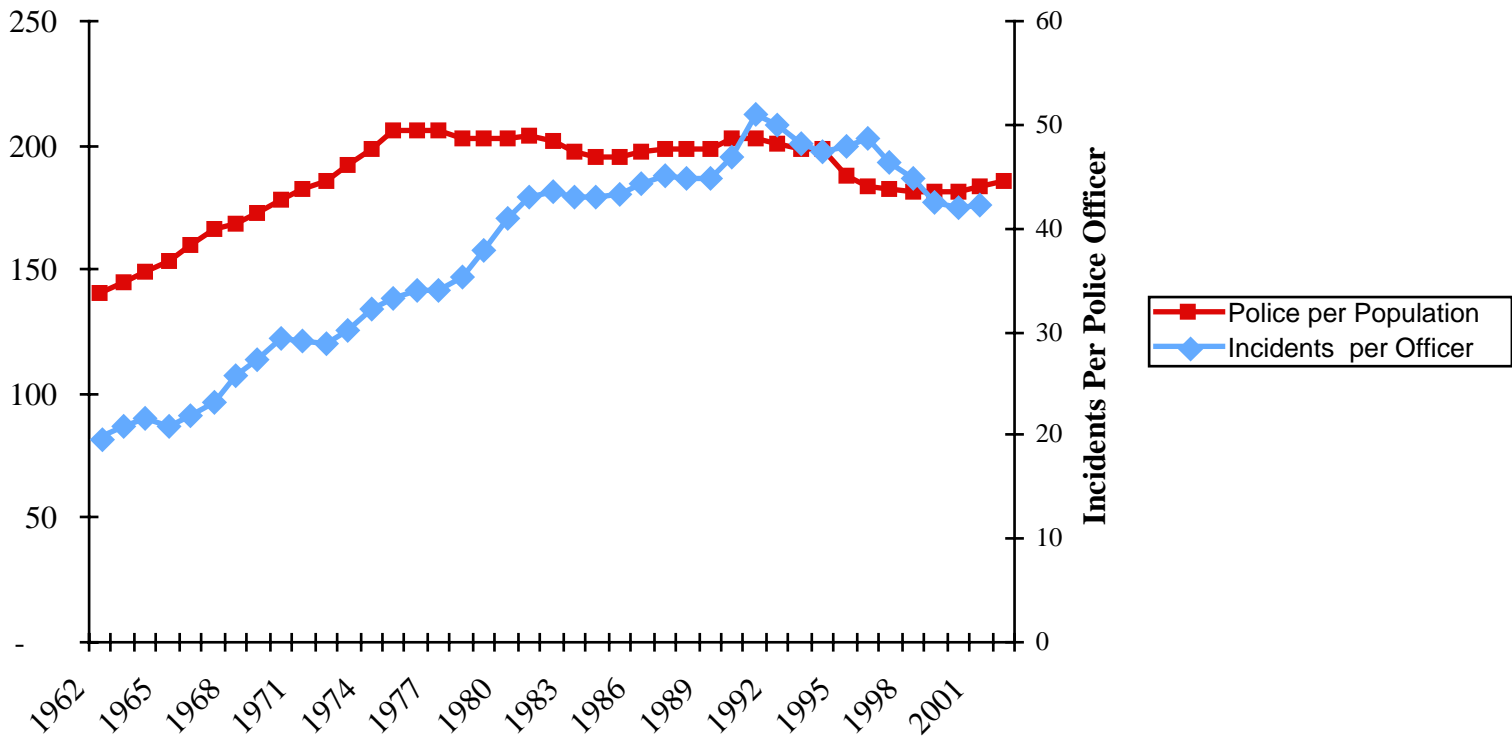
# Punishment too lenient



- 
- Crimes against the person
    - 35% of cases where accused found guilty were sentenced to prison
    - 24% of those convicted of common assault were sentenced to prison
    - 44% of the other convictions sentenced to prison



# Police Trends in Canada



Source: Statistics Canada

# What works?



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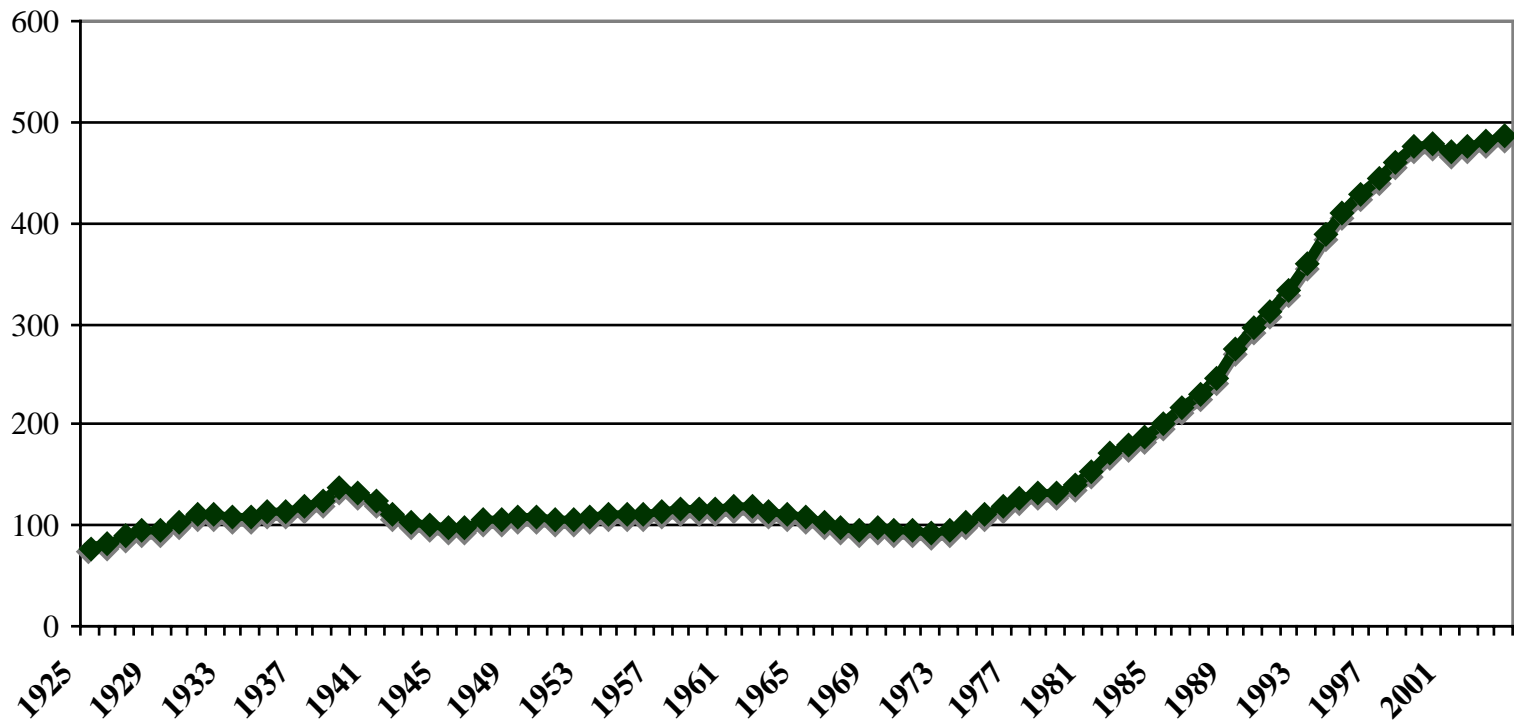
Why is Criminal Violence  
Decreasing in the United States?

# What is the US Doing?



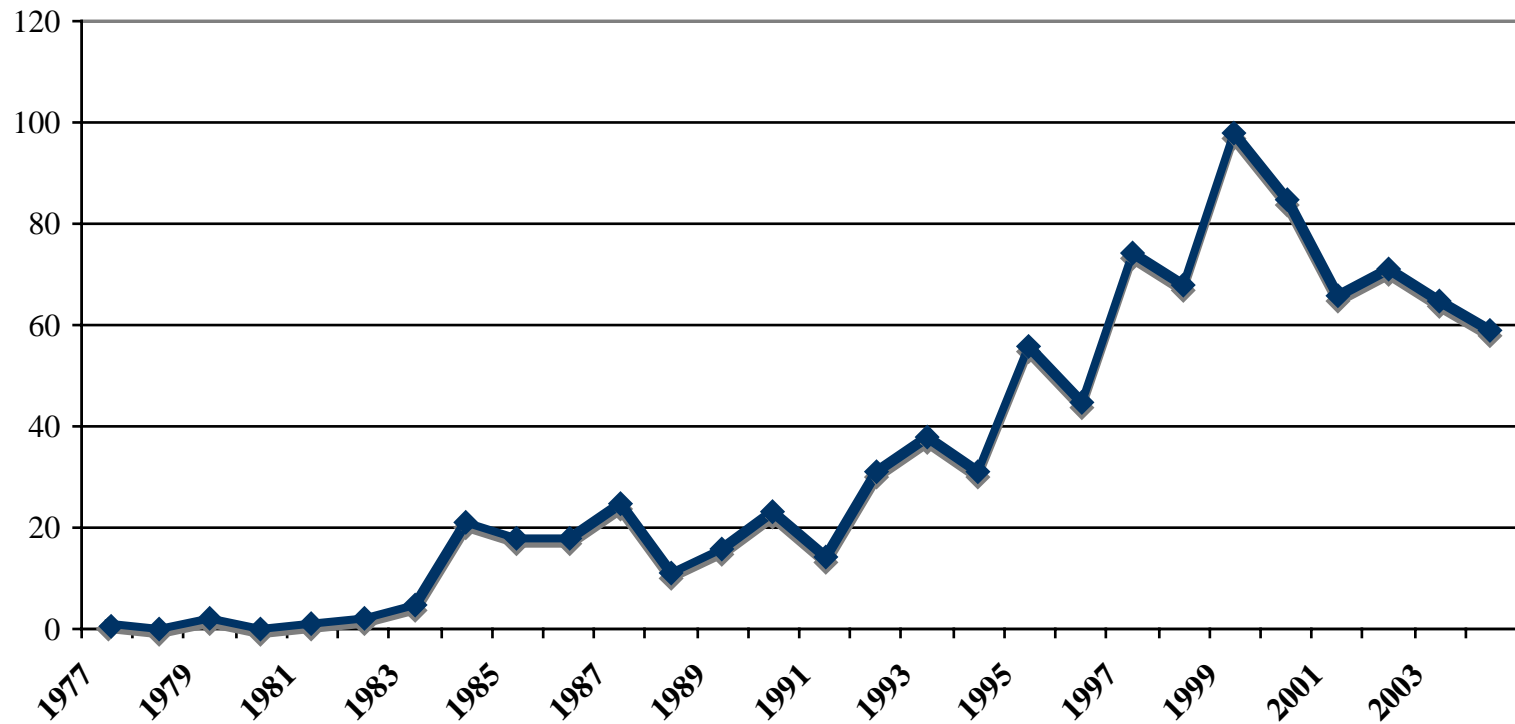
- 
- Higher rates of conviction
    - More police
    - More arrests
  - Tougher punishment
    - Longer sentences
    - Capital punishment
  - Concealed carry laws

# Sentenced Prisoners in State and Federal Institutions



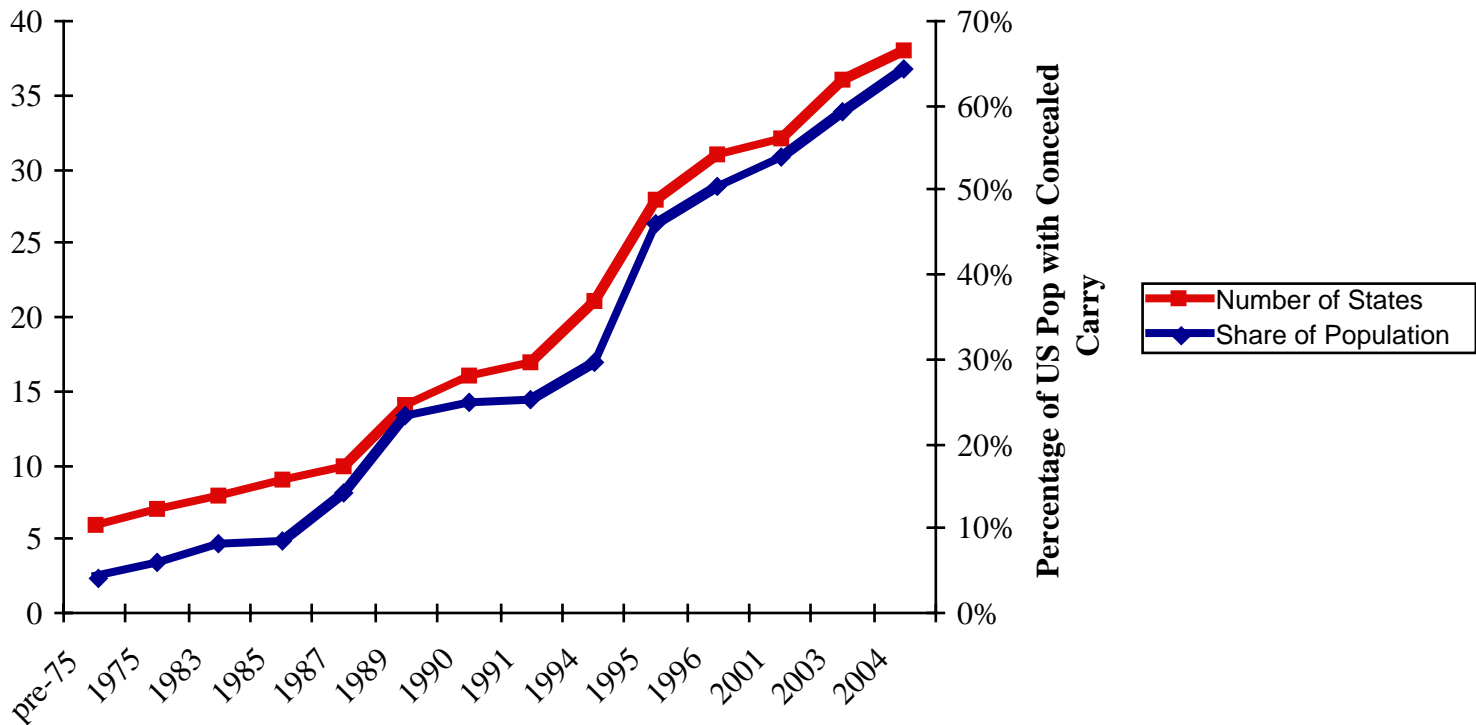
Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics

# Capital Punishment, 1977-2004



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics

# Increase in Concealed Carry Laws

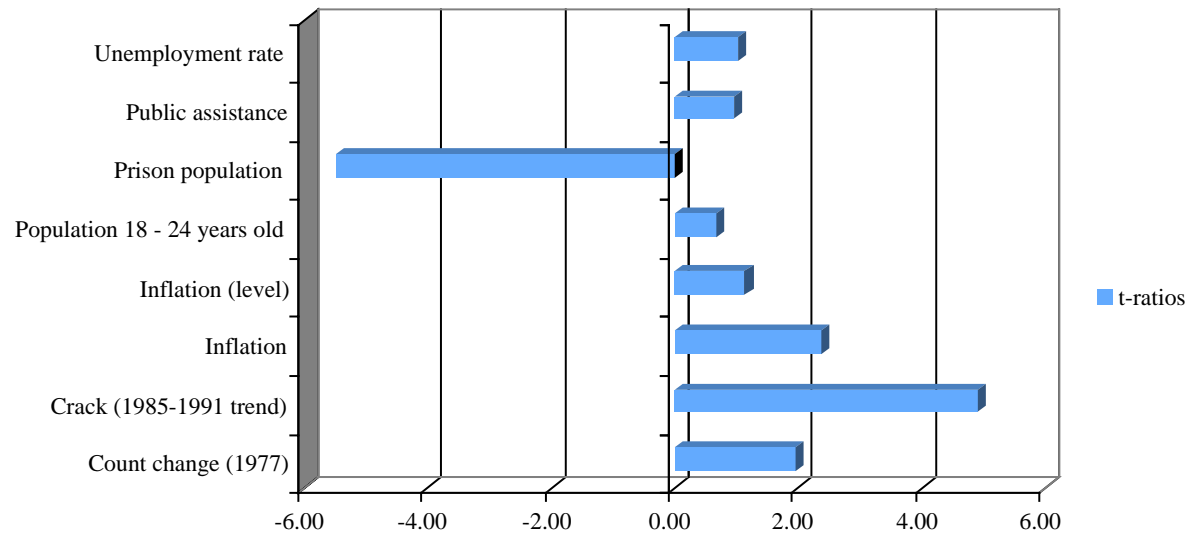


Source: NRA website and US Census Bureau

# And the results?

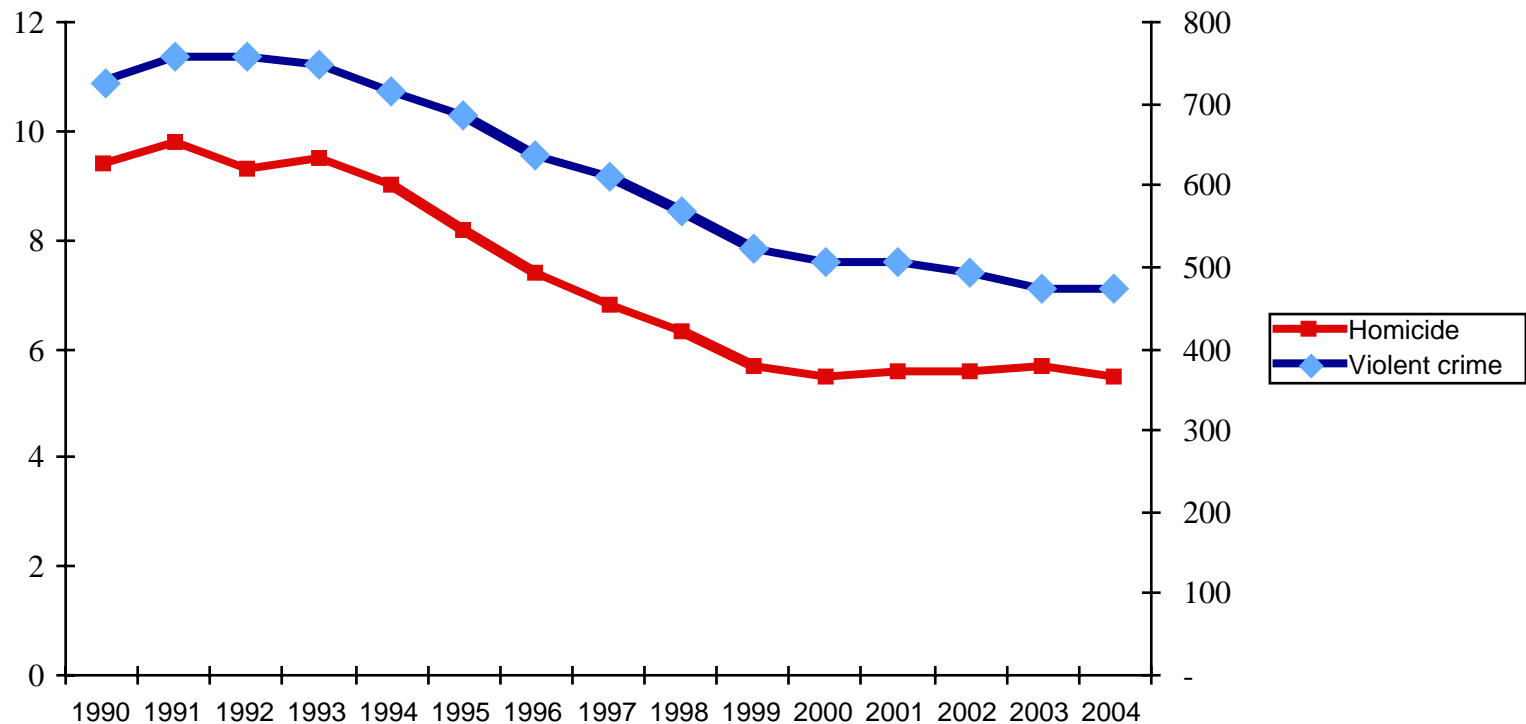


## Homicide and Prison Population (1962 - 1994)



Source: Marvell and Moody

# Homicide and Violent Crime Rates Declined in US



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports



# England & Wales vs. USA



- 
- The risk of punishment is generally greater in the US than in England
    - Murder                    5 : 4
    - Rape                        11 : 4
    - Robbery                  22 : 3
    - Assault                    11 : 1
  - The risk of punishment is generally **rising** in the US but **falling** in England

# England & Wales vs. USA



- 
- Since 1981, an offender's risk of being caught, convicted and sentenced has **risen** in the US for murder, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, and motor vehicle theft, but
  - An offender's risk has **fallen** in England and Wales for all but murder

# Conclusions

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- The research shows:
  - Longer prison sentences reduce violent crime rates
  - Concealed carry reduces violent crime rates
- No evidence that general firearm laws are effective

# Challenges



- 
- Should Canada borrow American ideas?
  - What should our priorities be?
  - Why not focus more on ‘high risk’ people rather than farmers with firearms?

# Types of “high risk” people



- 
- Convicted violent criminals, prisoners, parolees
  - Persons prohibited from owning guns by the courts
  - Persons with an outstanding criminal arrest warrant
  - Persons subject to restraining orders or bail conditions
  - Persons subject to a deportation order
  - Persons with refused or revoked firearm licence or certificate
  
  - Recommendation: focus on people who have proven that they pose a danger to society

# Estimated numbers of “high-risk” people



Federally incarcerated offenders	9,646
Federal offenders in community	5,137
Illegal immigrants ordered deported	30,000 [est]
Restraining orders or bail conditions	40,000 [est]
Armed/dangerous alerts	33,000 [est]
Prohibited from possessing firearms	201,097



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Questions?