

1. CONVENTIONAL CRIME: AN OVERVIEW

The Caribbean countries are highly diverse in terms of their political structure, population size, and level of development. They share the experience of a colonial past and a geography which places them in the path of the international drug trade. According to figures from the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Interpol, the overall Caribbean murder rate of 30 per 100,000 is higher than for any other region of the world. The region also has high levels of other violent crime, and violence against women is widespread.

1.1 Crime is arguably the number one social issue for much of the Caribbean, with its only serious rival being economic development (see World Bank, 2005a).¹ Leaders are coming to realize, however, that the two issues are strongly related.² Crime drives away investment, both foreign and domestic, and consequently slows growth. The Caribbean has been described as the most tourism-dependent area in the world, and crime is anathema for this industry.³ A second key industry—the financial services sector—is threatened by white collar crime and money laundering.⁴ The region is also one of the areas of the world most affected by brain drain, and there is evidence that crime is feeding this exodus in some areas.⁵ In these and many other ways, it is clear that crime is impeding the development of the Caribbean.

1.2 The Caribbean is especially vulnerable to crime for several reasons. It suffers from the disadvantage of being situated between the world's source of cocaine (the Andean region of South America) and its primary consumer markets (the United States and Europe) (UNODC, 2006).⁶ As small islands, Caribbean countries and territories have large coastlines and territorial waters to control relative to their ability to fund law enforcement coverage. Small criminal justice systems are easily overwhelmed in terms of police, courts, and prisons. Police must deal with seasonal tourist inflows, and, in some countries, the number of annual visitors actually exceeds the size of the local population. The Caribbean has some of the highest prisoner to population ratios in the world, and overcrowding interferes with the rehabilitation process.⁷ Finally, a number of countries

¹ The open-ended question “What would you say is the single most serious challenge facing our country today?” was asked to a representative sample of the population of the islands of St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Antigua and Barbuda in Spring 2005. “The crime rate” was the most popular response, with 45 percent of respondents mentioning it as a first or second priority. The next most common response was “the rising cost of living”, mentioned by 26 percent as a first or second priority.

² See Annex 1.1 for quotations from Caribbean leaders on the threat posed by crime.

³ See Annex 1.2 for a discussion of the importance of tourism in Caribbean economy.

⁴ See Box 2.1 for discussion of an example of white collar crime in the Dominican Republic.

⁵ See Annex 1.3 for a discussion of the links between emigration and crime.

⁶ In 2005, nearly all the world's cocaine came from Colombia (54 percent), Peru (30 percent), and Bolivia (16 percent). Most of this cocaine was used in North America (about half) and West/Central Europe (about a quarter). Cocaine prices in these countries were also generally higher than in other markets.

⁷ See Annex 1.4 for discussions of Caribbean police forces and prison populations.

have experienced periods of political instability, which may have a long-term impact on crime.⁸

1.3 Discussions of crime typically distinguish between “organized crime” and “conventional crime.” Organized crime typically refers to criminal enterprises (crime organizations that operate in similar fashion to businesses), while conventional crime includes all the common law offenses of murder, rape, assault, robbery, burglary, theft, fraud, and the like. This chapter discusses conventional crime, while the following chapter provides an overview of organized crime in the Caribbean.

THE DIVERSITY OF THE CARIBBEAN

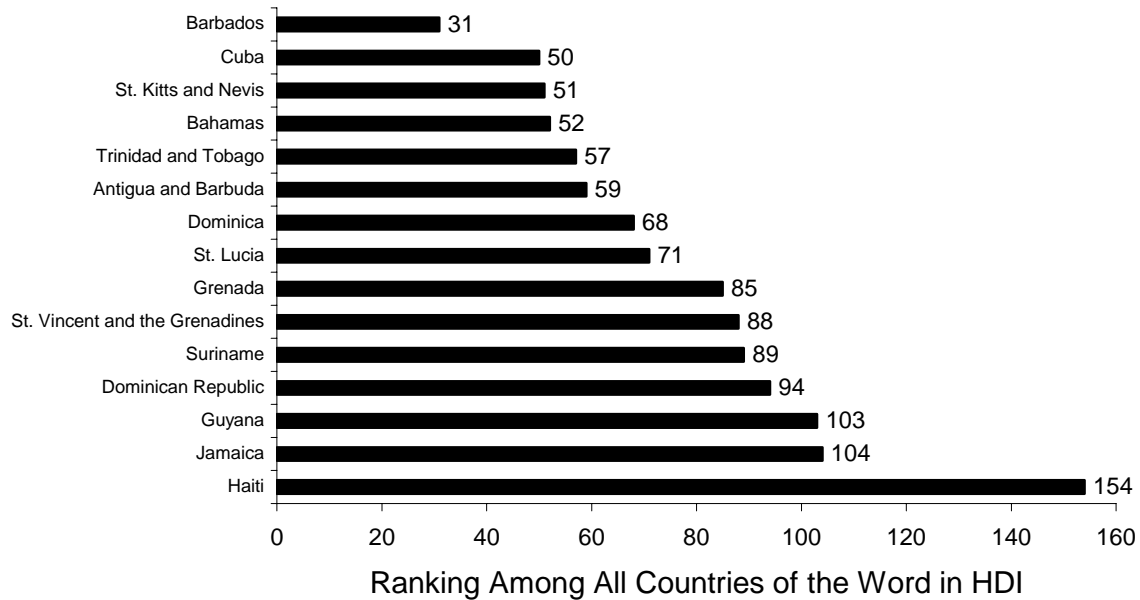
1.4 To those unfamiliar with the area, “the Caribbean” conjures rather uniform images of picture-postcard islands. The truth is that, on the contrary, it would be difficult to imagine a region that displays more diversity than the Caribbean.

- The area was colonized by Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and each power left its mark on the language, culture, and politics of the areas it held. Some countries retain varying degrees of dependence on these powers.
- Some countries are highly developed, such as Barbados, which appears 31st in the world in the United Nations 2006 Human Development Index rankings, just above the Czech Republic. Others are extremely poor, such as Haiti, which ranks 154th, below both Kenya and Zimbabwe (see Figure 1.1) (UNDP, 2006).
- Populations vary from about 4,000 (Montserrat) to over 11 million (Cuba).

1.5 This final factor, the uneven distribution of the region’s population among countries, considerably complicates crime analysis. While there are 20 to 30 countries and territories in the Caribbean (depending on how they are counted) some 88 percent of the population is found in just five countries (see Figure 1.2). Since many islands are actually parts of larger countries (for example, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba are part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands while Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana are French *départments*), they are often excluded from discussions of regional issues. If only fully independent countries are included in the analysis, Cuba comprises a third and the Dominican Republic and Haiti together half of the regional population.

⁸ Key among these areas are Jamaica, which has experienced political violence since the 1940s, and Haiti, which has had repeated periods of instability since independence in 1804.

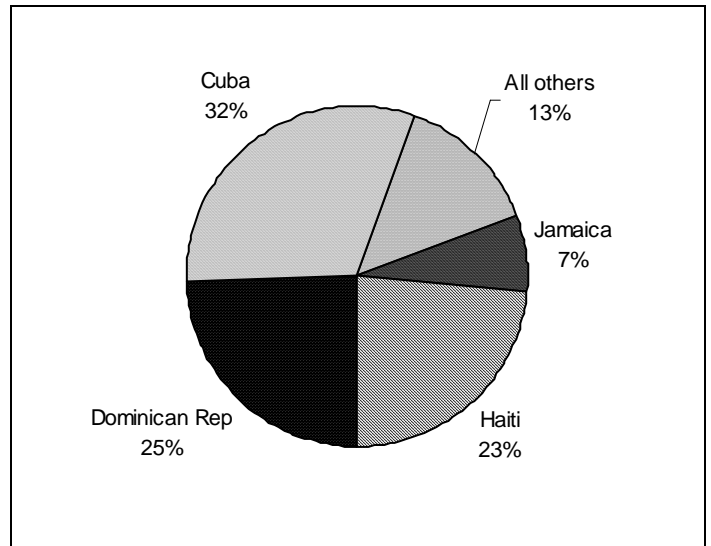
Figure 1.1: Ranking of Caribbean Countries in the Human Development Index



Source: Human Development Report 2006.

1.6 Thus, the Caribbean is highly diverse, but the population of the Caribbean is concentrated in a few countries that may not represent the experiences of the smaller islands. For example, while the majority of the countries and territories are English-speaking, the bulk of the population is Spanish-speaking. Cuba comprises over a quarter of the total regional population (a third of the independent Caribbean), and its society and politics are unlike those of the other islands. Haiti makes up a fifth but is a unique case due its extreme poverty and history of political instability and violence. Often both Cuba and Haiti are excluded from analysis due to data availability, but this also presents problems: it is difficult to speak of “the Caribbean” while excluding almost half the region’s population, and doing so gives disproportionate weight to the experiences of the Dominican Republic and Jamaica.

Figure 1.2: Population Distribution of the Independent Caribbean

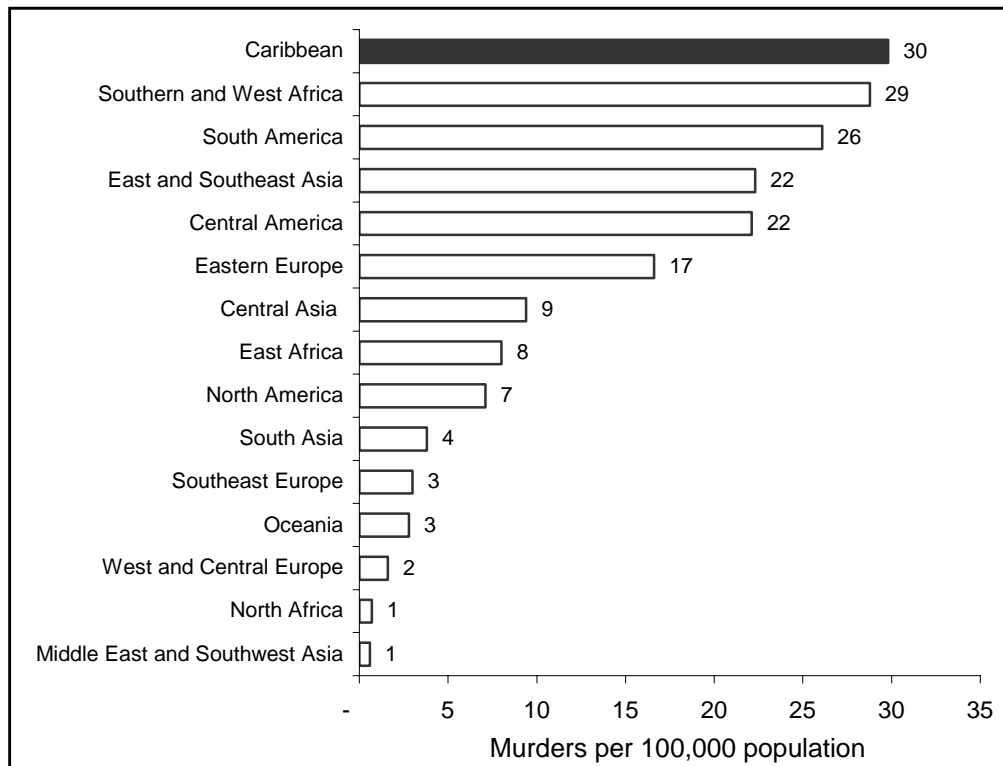


Source: UN Population Division.

1.7 For this reason, it is difficult to compare the Caribbean as a region to other regions in the world in terms of crime. Does the Caribbean have a serious crime problem?

It depends on which countries are included in the sample, and any generalization will gloss over a tremendous variety of experiences. But at least one international comparison, done by the UNODC based on standardized data sources, suggested that the Caribbean suffers from more murder per capita than any other region of the world (see Figure 1.3) (UNODC, 2005).

Figure 1.3: Murder Rates by Region



Source: UNODC Crime Trends Surveys and Interpol, 2002 or most recent year.

HOW TO MEASURE CRIME?

1.8 In general, crime data are extremely problematic, and the Caribbean region provides an excellent case study of just how deceptive they can be. The best source of information on crime comes from household surveys, such as the standardized crime surveys conducted under the aegis of the International Crime Victims Surveys (ICVS). Unfortunately, only one country in the Caribbean has participated in the ICVS: Barbados. Information from other survey sources can be interesting, but rarely approaches the degree of precision needed for sound analysis of the crime situation. For example, the Latinobarómetro poll covers 18 countries in Latin America but only asks the most general questions about crime.

1.9 The official crime figures published by national governments are much more problematic. They are generally based on police statistics, and the police figures are

largely based on cases that are reported to the police by the public. Unreported cases cannot be recorded, and there is good reason to believe a great deal of crime is not reported in the region. Making comparisons across jurisdictions is even more complicated, because the precise rate of under-reporting varies between countries, and countries where the criminal justice system enjoys a good deal of public confidence tend to have higher rates of reporting. On the other hand, as Chapter 3 shows, it is precisely in the most crime ridden-areas that reporting rates are the lowest.

1.10 In addition, definitions of crime vary greatly between countries. Even for what seems like an easily defined offense such as murder, definitions vary widely, and crimes like burglary, robbery, and sexual offenses are defined very differently across jurisdictions. These differences are strongest when comparisons are made between entirely different legal traditions, and there are many in the Caribbean. In addition, the point in the criminal justice process when an alleged offense is recorded as a crime differs greatly between countries. This complicates comparison between civil law jurisdictions (such as in Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries) and common-law jurisdictions (such as the Anglophone states of the Caribbean).

Box 1.1 Crime Definitions

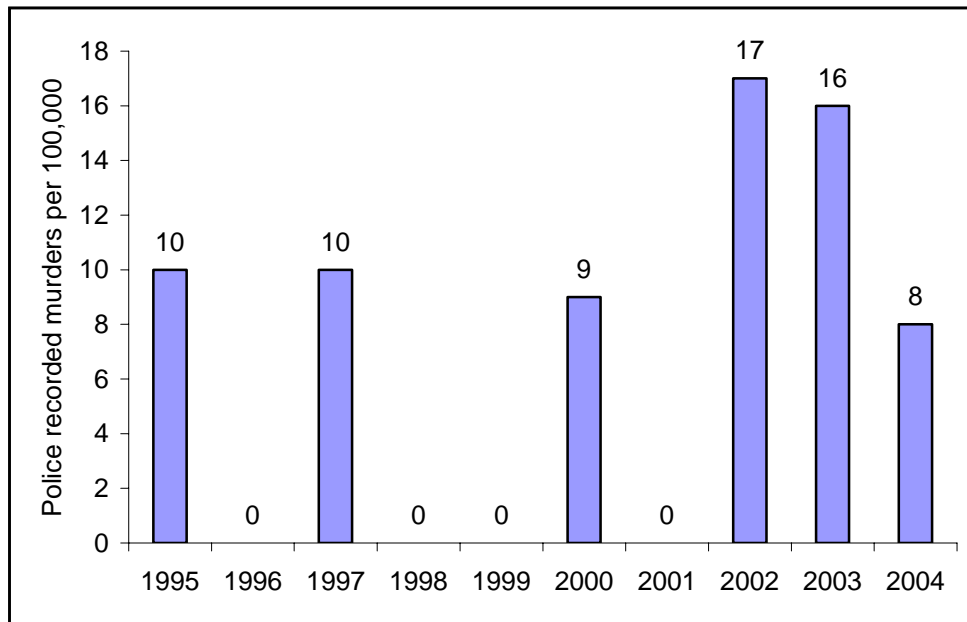
The following definitions of crime types are used by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in the biennial Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems:

- *Intentional homicide* is death deliberately inflicted on a person by another person, including infanticide.
- *Assault* is physical attack against the body of another person, including battery but excluding indecent assault.
- *Rape* is sexual intercourse without valid consent.
- *Robbery* is the theft of property from a person, overcoming resistance by force or threat of force.
- *Theft* is the removal of property without the property owner's consent.
- *Automobile theft* is the removal of a motor vehicle without the consent of the owner of the vehicle.
- *Burglary* is unlawful entry into someone else's premises with the intention to commit a crime.
- *Kidnapping* is unlawfully detaining a person or persons against their will (or national equivalent, e.g. using force, threat, fraud or enticement) for the purpose of demanding for their liberation an illicit gain or any other economic gain or other material benefit, or in order to oblige someone to do or not to do something.

1.11 Another issue is the usefulness of crime rates in very small countries. Small countries typically stand out in the global rankings of a number of variables when these figures are calculated as a rate per 100,000 citizens, because a relatively small number of incidents can result in high rates. Many countries and territories in the Caribbean have populations of less than 100,000. Low populations also make interpretation of rates over time difficult, since trends tend to be erratic. The figure below showing murder rates in Anguilla (population 10,000-16,000, depending on source) illustrates this point. Since 1995 Anguilla has experienced either zero, one, or two murders per year—yet the

difference between zero and two murders is enough to move Anguilla from a low to a high murder rate (see Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4: Murders per 100,000 Population by Year, Anguilla

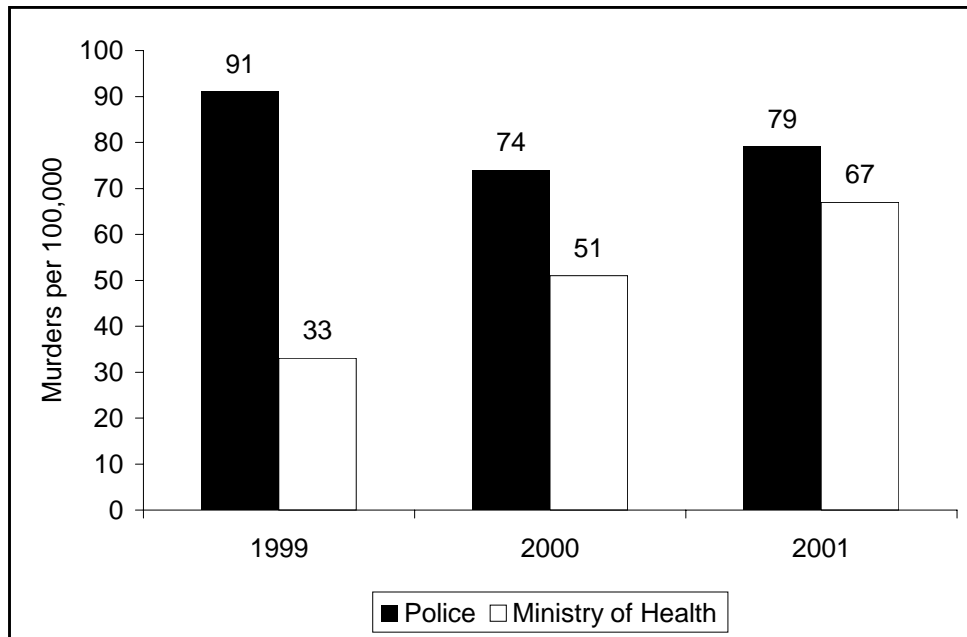


Source: Anguilla Statistics Unit.

1.12 Crime rates are based on the ratio of crimes to full-time residents, but the actual population of small countries with large tourist industries can swell considerably during peak tourism periods. For example, the Bahamas, with a resident population of about 321,000, received nearly 1.5 million stay-over tourist arrivals in 2003 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2004). Any of these people could have become a crime victim or perpetrator during their stay, so the ratio of crimes to the resident population can be deceptive.

1.13 To complicate matters further, there are frequently significant discrepancies in crime rates within a country depending on the source of the data. In the case of homicide rates, police and public health data sometimes differ substantially. The case of Guyana is instructive: two different murder counts are published in the same statistical bulletin—one from the police and one from the ministry of health. This difference is not surprising since public health definitions differ from those used in the criminal justice system, but the ratio between the two varies also considerably over time. The public health figures show a clear increasing trend, while the police figures do not (see Figure 1.5).

Figure 1.5: Number of Murders in Guyana, Police and Public Health Sources



Source: Guyana Bureau of Statistics, 2005.

1.14 UNODC attempts to overcome some of these difficulties through its biannual Survey on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, or CTS. A questionnaire is sent to all United Nations Member States giving standardized definitions of each crime type and asking the respondents to fit their crime figures into the appropriate categories. Of course, this is a difficult exercise, and it is not clear how carefully each respondent complies, but it does provide a better basis for comparison than the figures published by the national police forces.⁹ In the discussion that follows, the CTS data is used, but this data must be treated with caution for all the reasons described above.

HOMICIDE AND ASSAULT

1.15 Murder figures are generally considered the most reliable indicator of the violent crime situation in a country, since most murders come to the attention of the police, which is not the case with crimes like robbery and domestic violence. But definitions of murder still vary widely. In some countries, attempted murder is included, since legally this is deemed equivalent to the completed act, while in others “culpable” homicides (the killing of another through reckless behavior) are included.

⁹ Unfortunately, not all Member States supply this information, or they do so erratically, and so global coverage is far from complete. Obviously, countries with extreme stability problems are not able to provide reliable statistics, and it is precisely in these areas that the problems are likely to be worst. For example, little police data are available for Haiti, a country which is probably one of the more dangerous in the region.

1.16 For these reasons, it is best to use standardized data (such as those gathered by CTS or Interpol) for comparative analysis. Unfortunately, the data from both CTS and Interpol are far from complete in this region. Time series CTS figures for the Caribbean are limited to four countries and Interpol figures to two, and even these two data sets differ in many respects.

1.17 Aside from the police statistics, public health authorities maintain records of the numbers of murders in many countries, which are collected by the World Health Organization (WHO) and their regional affiliates. These public health data are available for a wider range of countries than are CTS data, including very small countries. Public health definitions of murder are generally more expansive than those of criminal law, so these figures will be greater than those reported to the UNODC and Interpol.

1.18 According to figures published by the WHO from 2002, a number of Caribbean countries record a rate of death due to violence¹⁰ in excess of the unweighted average of the 191 countries reporting worldwide, but far below the rates of countries like Colombia, Sierra Leone, or El Salvador (see Figure 1.6). These countries include countries with acknowledged violence issues, such as the Dominican Republic and Haiti, as well as some surprises, such as St. Kitts and Nevis and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. WHO data for Jamaica are clearly in error. According to WHO data Jamaica has one of the lowest rates of intentional violence in the world. According to the police statistics, however, the homicide rate was 56 per 100,000 residents in 2005—one of the highest rates in the world (Jamaican Constabulary Force, 2006).

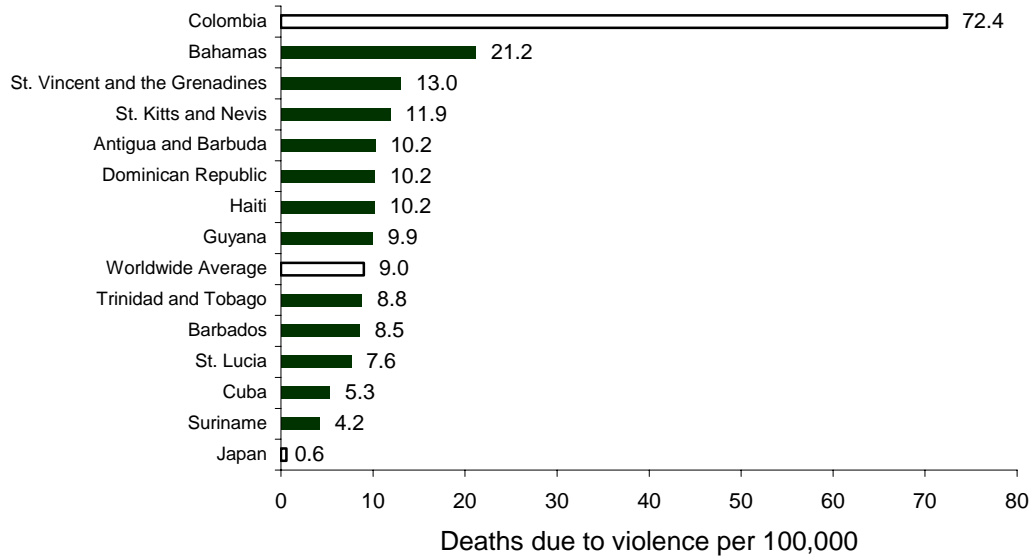
1.19 Where no standardized data are available, national police statistics can give us a sense of trends within a country over time. The Jamaican Constabulary Force makes long-term comprehensive statistics available to the public, and the trend for Jamaica is quite remarkable (see Figure 1.7). After a peak during the politically-driven violence of the 1980 election, murder rates dropped to pre-election levels and were relatively stable throughout the 1980s. It was during this period of time that many Jamaican criminal groups (“posses”) were active in the crack cocaine markets of the United States (Gunst, 1995). Ironically, as the crack trade declined, Jamaican murder rates went up. This may be due to former traffickers turning to income sources more directly rooted in violence, such as extortion. It may also be a symptom of the declining political control of the “area dons” in the “garrison” communities and the proliferation of a larger number of “corner dons,” more likely to victimize their own constituencies (Mogensen, 2005), or it may also be related to the deportation of some Jamaican criminals that had been preying on the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada (see Chapter 6).

1.20 Between 1982 and 1997, the homicide rate more than doubled in Jamaica; from 2003 to 2005 alone, the homicide rate rose from 36 to 58 per 100,000, before falling to 49 per 100,000 in 2006. Jamaica authorities attribute the 15% decline in the homicide rate in 2006 to law enforcement action. While the recent decline is encouraging, murder rates in Jamaica remain among the highest in the world, and similar rapid reductions in the past

¹⁰ Violence in this context is defined as intentional violence minus suicides and war deaths.

have not abated a long-term upward trend. Still, more than 200 people are alive today that would not have been had the murder rate remained at 2005 levels.

Figure 1.6: Deaths Rates from Violence in Caribbean and Comparison Countries

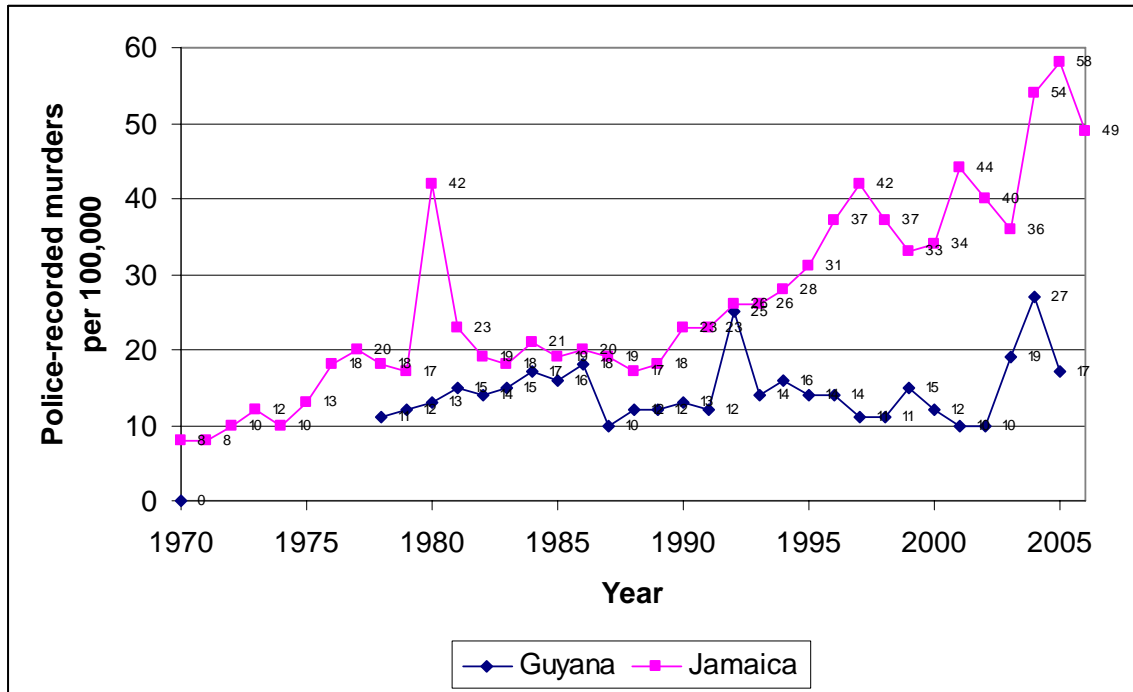


Source: WHO 2002.

1.21 The murder rate in Guyana (see Figure 1.7) has been a subject of frequent alarm in the country, but it displays no clear trend. An average of about 75 to 125 murders occurred annually since 1978, aside from brief peaks in 1991 and 2002-2003. The most recent increase has been attributed to gang warfare in the Buxton area (Guyana Government Information Agency, 2004). Given the small population (about three quarters of a million people), the murder rate is quite volatile and has varied from a low of about 10 per 100,000 in 1986 and 2000 to a high of 27 per 100,000 in 2003. As noted above, the police figures differ considerably from Ministry of Health figures, which were higher to varying degrees in 1999 (33 murders per 100,000 versus 12), 2000 (51 versus 10) and 2001 (67 versus 19).

1.22 Shorter time series on homicide rates are available for the Dominican Republic, St. Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago (see Figure 1.8). All three countries show rapidly rising rates over the 1999-2005 period. In the Dominican Republic, the homicide rate almost doubled, from 14 to 27 per 100,000. In St. Lucia, the rate more than doubled, from 9 to 20, and in Trinidad and Tobago the rate more than quadrupled, from 7 to 30 per 100,000.

Figure 1.7: Homicides per 100,000 in Guyana and Jamaica



Sources: Jamaica Constabulary Force, 2006; Guyana Bureau of Statistics, 2005.

1.23 According to the police statistics, the French *départements* (provinces) in the Caribbean also show remarkably high murder rates, despite their relative affluence. Out of 100 French *départements*, Guiana ranks first in terms of homicide, suffering a total of 94 murders in 2004, for a police recorded murder rate 51 murders 100,000.¹¹ Guadeloupe and Martinique ranked third and fourth of 100, with 11 and 10 murders per 100,000 respectively (Direction Centrale de la Police Judiciaire, 2005).

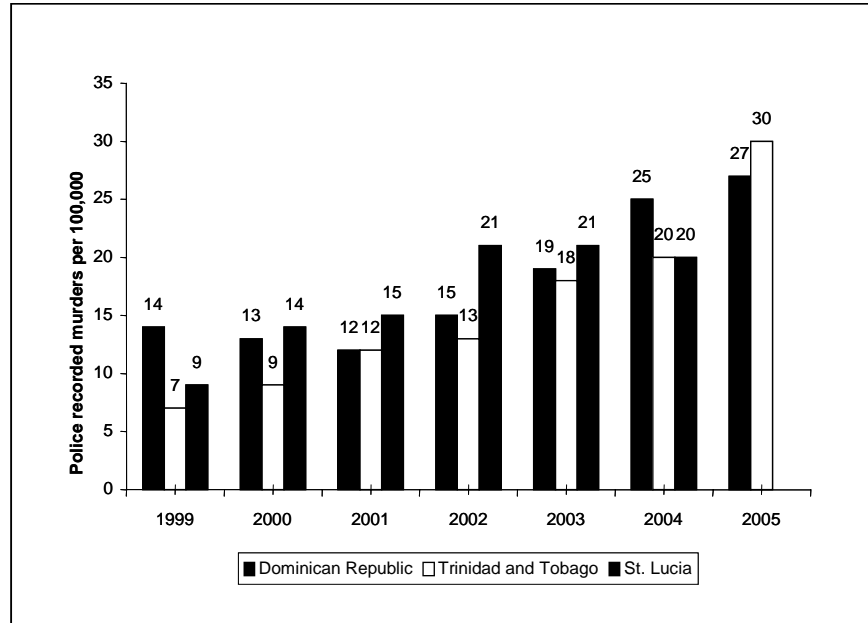
1.24 In sum, homicide rates in the Caribbean are quite high by world standards. For the majority of countries for which time series data are available, homicide rates seem to be rising quite rapidly. Guyana is a notable exception to this trend.

1.25 While most murders make it to the attention of the police, lesser assaults are clearly highly reliant on reporting. The country's attitude toward domestic violence is pivotal, as is the level of trust in the local police. Figure 1.9 reports assault rates for countries with available CTS data. Even Dominica, with its 93 assaults annually per 100,000 citizens, is far in excess of the unweighted average of 10 for the 89 countries for which comparable data are available. The Bahamas reports the highest rate in the CTS dataset: 1,697 per 100,000, twice as high as the second highest rate recorded: 754 per 100,000 in Swaziland, a world leader in murder. This high rate is probably attributable to genuinely high levels of violence, possibly affected by the tourist influx, combined with high rates of reporting to a trusted police force. Victimization surveys are needed to even

¹¹ This is much higher than its closest rival, Southern Corsica, which registered 21 murders per 100,000.

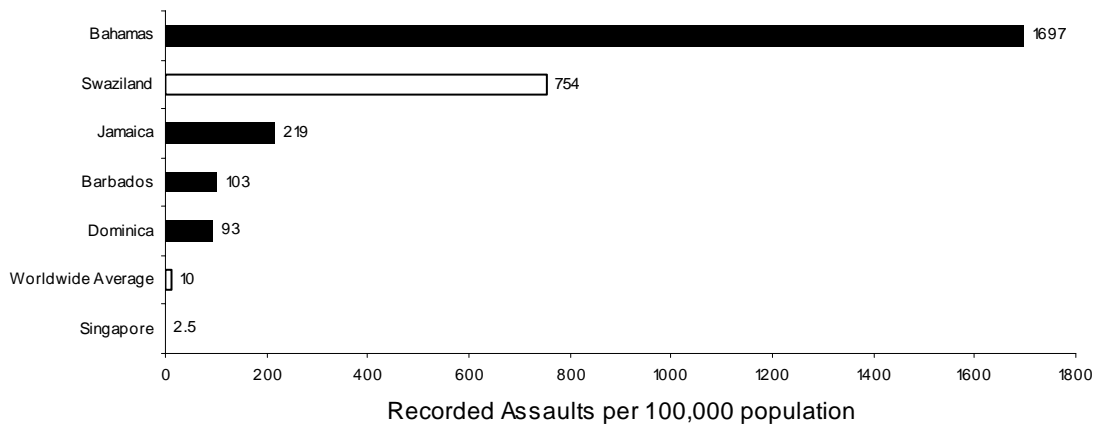
approximate true levels of assault, yet standardized victimization surveys have rarely been undertaken in the Caribbean.

Figure 1.8: Homicides Rates in the Dominican Republic, St. Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago: 1999-2005



Sources: Procuraduría General de la República Dominicana; Central Statistical Office of Trinidad and Tobago; Central Statistical Office of St. Lucia.

Figure 1.9: Assault Rates in Caribbean and Comparison Countries

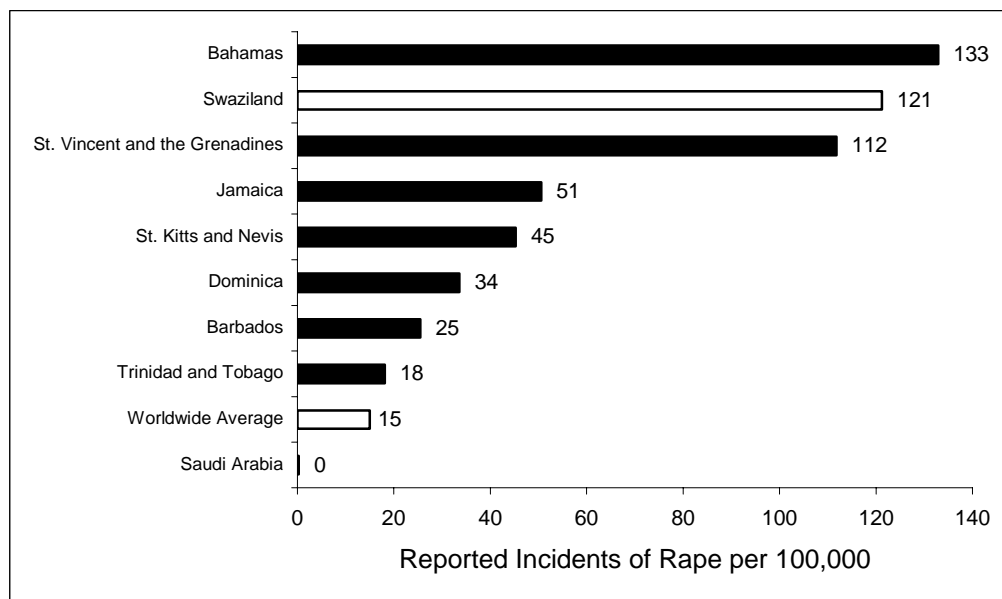


Source: Crime Trends Surveys – United Nations (various years).

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

1.26 Violence against women affects a significant percentage of women and girls in the Caribbean.¹² Rape is greatly under-reported everywhere in the world, and relatively high recorded rape rates can actually be due to high levels of trust that reporting will result in positive outcomes for the victim. But given the fact that most of the rapes reported did occur, high rape rates do reflect a serious problem. According to the latest available CTS data, three of the top ten recorded rape rates occur in the Caribbean, including the top rated: the Bahamas. All countries in the Caribbean for which comparable data are available experienced a higher rate of rape than the unweighted average of 102 countries responding to the CTS: 15 rapes per 100,000.

Figure 1.10: Rape Rates in Caribbean and Comparison Countries



Source: Crime Trends Surveys – United Nations (various years).

1.27 According to police records in the Dominican Republic, women between the ages of 15 and 34 account for nearly two-thirds of all violent deaths among women, despite only representing 36 percent of the female population (ALEPH, 2006.) Those at highest risk are young women working as domestic laborers and those having recently ended an intimate relationship. In approximately 63 percent of cases, the perpetrator is the victim's husband (boyfriend) or ex-husband (ex-boyfriend), followed by mothers (14 percent) and fathers (10 percent) (Caceres, F. and G. Estevez, 2004).

1.28 Police statistics offer only a very imperfect picture of violence against women, since the majority of these incidents are not reported to police. To get a more precise idea

¹² Violence against women was defined by a declaration of the General Assembly of the United Nations (Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993) as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

of prevalence rates, one must use victimization surveys that focus on violence against women. Unfortunately, as is the case with other crimes, there are no victimization surveys using a common methodology that have been widely used across the Caribbean to document levels of violence against women (see Ellsberg and Heise, 2005).¹³ Consequently, we are left with isolated, country-specific data on prevalence rates; while this is undoubtedly better than relying on country-specific official crime reports, it does not allow cross-country comparisons.

1.29 One notable exception is a regional study carried out in nine Caribbean countries in 1997 and 1998 on adolescent health. According to this study, 48 percent of adolescent girls' sexual initiation was "forced" or "somewhat forced" in these nine countries (see Halcon et al, 2003).¹⁴ In Kingston, Jamaica in the early 1990s, 17 percent of 13 and 14 year-olds had been raped or been victims of attempted rape, and 33 percent had experienced unwanted physical contact or verbal enticements to have sex (Walker et al., 1994).

1.30 While there has been no comparable methodology used in a large number of Caribbean countries on domestic violence, national level prevalence studies generate surprisingly similar victimization rates. In Haiti, a recent DHS survey found that 28.8 percent of ever-married women had been beaten by a spouse. Older data from nationally representative surveys undertaken in Antigua and Barbuda and Barbados in 1990 indicated that 30 percent of all women in each country had been victimized by physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner at some point in their lives (see Heise et al, 1999).¹⁵ These lifetime prevalence rates are within the range of those found outside the region in a study recently undertaken by the World Health Organization. Rates of lifetime physical violence ranged from a low of 12.9 percent in urban Japan to a high of 61 percent in rural Peru, with a non-population weighted average prevalence rate of 36.3 percent over the 15 study sites in the ten countries (García-Moreno, C. et al., 2006).

1.31 In sum, violence against women seems to be endemic in Caribbean countries—as it is in most countries around the world.

PROPERTY CRIME

1.32 As the preceding sections have shown, the rate of murders is the single best crime statistic for comparative analysis. Data on property crime are far less reliable, since the rates of reporting the various offenses vary so greatly between jurisdictions and across time. In wealthier countries, a greater share of the population may have insurance and thus strong incentives for reporting victimization. These countries may appear to have much higher rates of property crime than poorer areas. Similarly, in some countries

¹³ Standard victimization surveys do not do a good job of capturing violence against women. Special protocols are needed, both to protect the safety of interviewers and respondents, and to elicit accurate answers.

¹⁴ 32 percent of male adolescents' first intercourse was forced. The nine countries and territories were: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, and St. Lucia.

¹⁵ In Antigua and Barbuda, the sample was of women ages 29-45, while in Barbados it was women 20-45.

reporting minor crimes is seen as a civic duty, even if the prospects for a positive outcome are poor. If there were good victim survey data indicating the level of under-reporting, the police figures could be interpreted in this light. Unfortunately, only Barbados has participated in the ICVS surveys.

1.33 Generally speaking, the best reported property crime is vehicular theft, and it is often used as an indicator of overall property crime levels. There are two problems with doing this in the Caribbean. First, the opportunities to successfully steal a car are limited on small islands, so vehicular theft rates may not be indicative of overall property crime levels. Second, since not everyone owns a car, the rate of property theft should properly be calculated as the number of incidents per motor vehicle in the country, not per 100,000 population. However, recent and reliable information on the number of vehicles in the Caribbean is not available.

1.34 The fact that reporting rates are key determinants in the levels of recorded crime is demonstrated by the available statistics on other forms of property crime. Australia leads the world in reported burglary rates, with Dominica scoring third, after Denmark (United Nations Crime Trends Survey, various years). While it is possible that some of the most developed countries, with low levels of inequality, suffer from extreme levels of burglary, it is more likely that this offense is simply under-reported in countries where it actually occurs more often.

1.35 Theft rates are subject to even higher levels of under-reporting. It is highly unlikely, for example, that Denmark has an incidence of major theft 7,000 times higher than in Poland (3,449 episodes per 100,000 persons in Denmark, versus 0.5 per 100,000 in Poland). Dominica has the second highest rate of recorded major theft among the 65 countries reporting this figure in the Crime Trends Survey, but the meaning of this distinction is highly dubious.

1.36 Given what is known about other aspects of crime in the region, it is highly unlikely that Dominica, which bills itself as “the nature island of the Caribbean” has 20 times the burglary rate and 30 times the theft rate of Jamaica, an island with acknowledged crime problems.