

National Experiences with Firearms Regulations:

Evaluating the Implications for Public
Safety

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Do firearm regulations create a safer society?

- Modern gun regulations appear to follow televised gun crime
- Politicians promise that more restrictive gun laws will make society safer
- But do they?

Some promises

- “The goal of the new regulations is ... to help keep Canada safe... [and]to prevent violence.”
 - Allan Rock, Justice Minister, Nov. 27, 1996
- “..the Firearms Program is improv(ing) public safety in Canada.”
 - Martin Cauchon, Justice Minister, Dec. 3, 2002

More promises

- “We’ve also noted the importance of removing easily concealable handguns from the community ...
- “Could I say that this is a very important step to making the streets of Australia safer.”
 - The Prime Minister, the Hon. John Howard

How can we know if firearms regulations improve public safety?

- If restrictive firearm regulations can create a safer society, then crime rates should drop over time
- We can compare the crime trends in a variety of countries

A natural quasi- experiment

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

What is the record?

- This paper compares crime and suicide trends in:
 - England and Wales,
 - Australia, and
 - Canada,
- With the trends in the United States

Notes

- To assess regulatory changes, must look at impact over time
- National averages are irrelevant
- Police statistics, despite limitations, are the best international measure

Caveat

- I am not examining whether gun laws cause gun crime to decrease (or increase)
- A policy could reduce gun crime, but overall violent crime could still increase
- Gun crime is just a fraction of violent crime

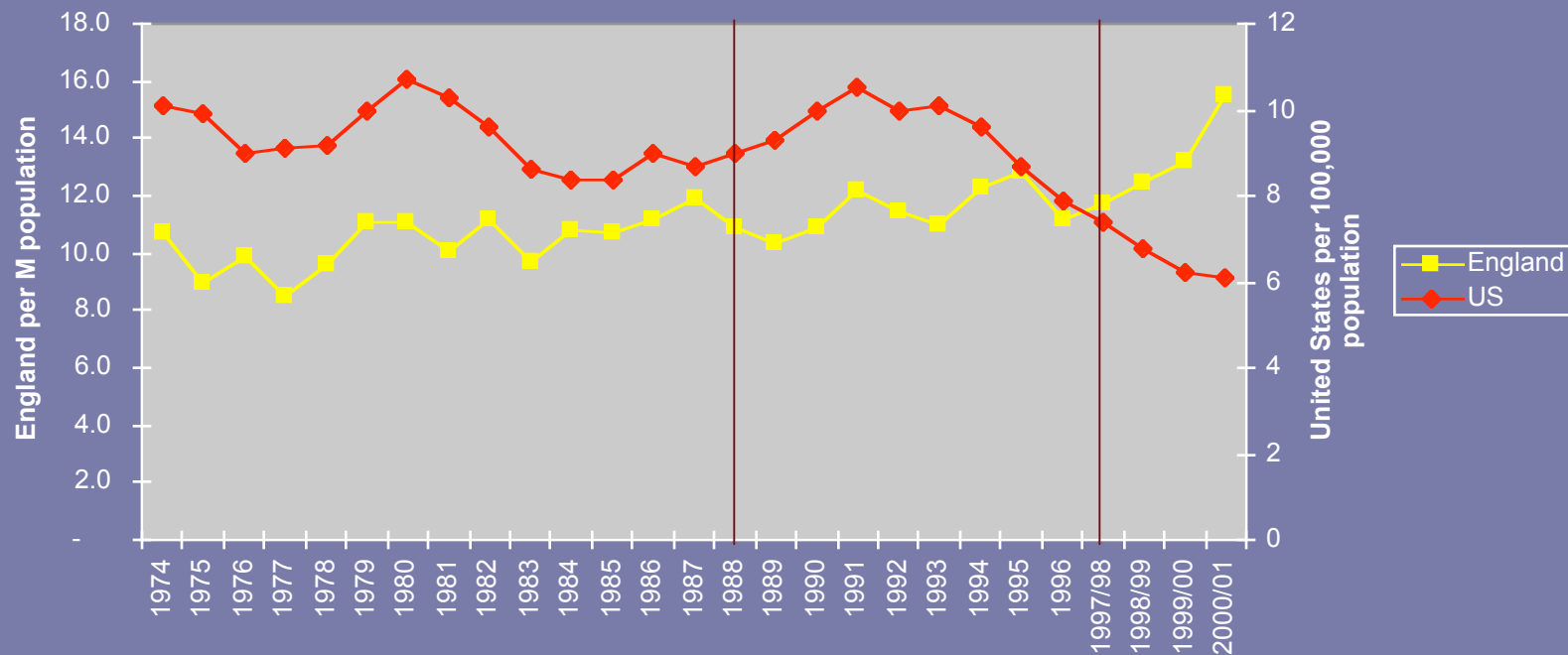
Great Britain

Recent firearm laws in Britain have increasingly restricted legal owners

- The Firearms (Amendment) Act of 1988 was brought in following the Hungerford incident
- The Firearms (Amendment) Act of 1997 was brought in after the Dunblane shooting
- Prohibited and confiscated all handguns

Homicide is Increasing in England and Wales

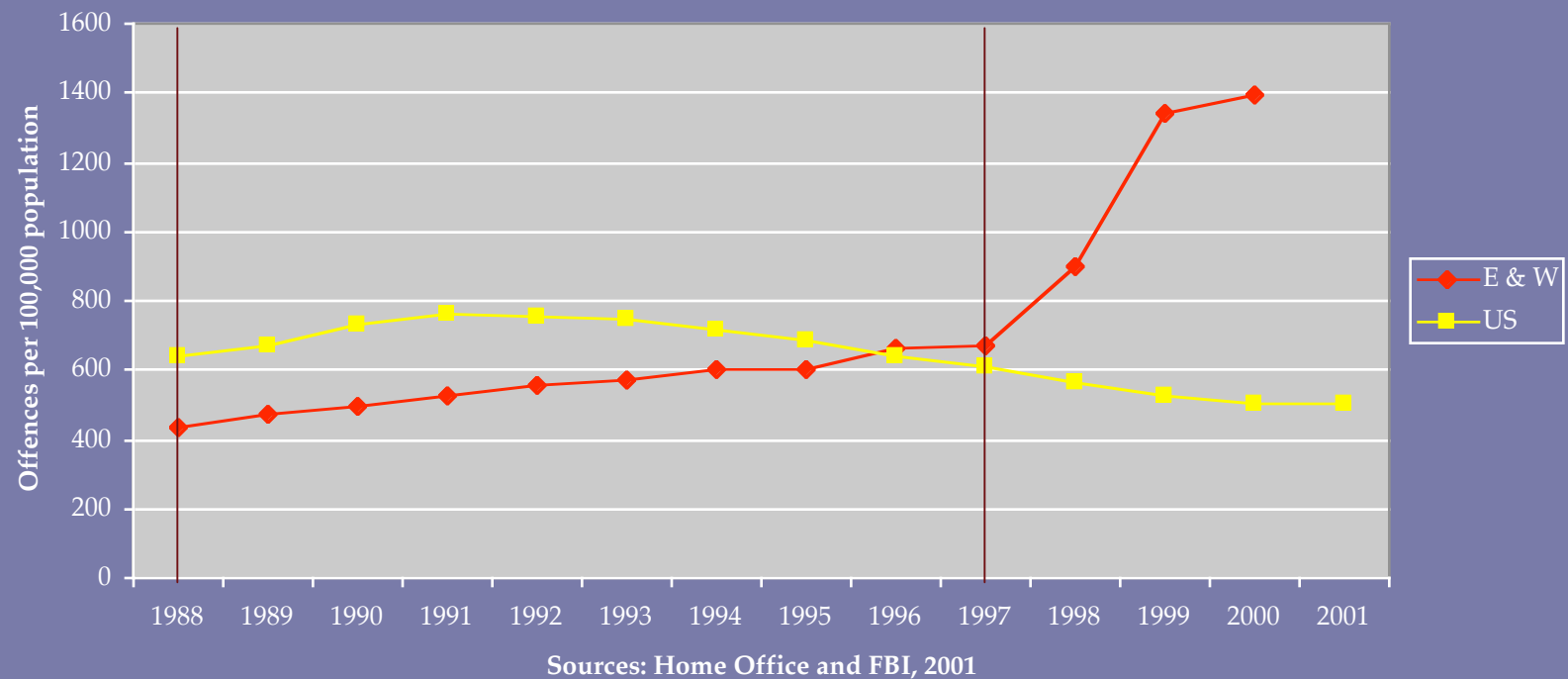
Fig. 1. Homicide Rates in England and the United States



Sources: Home Office and FBI

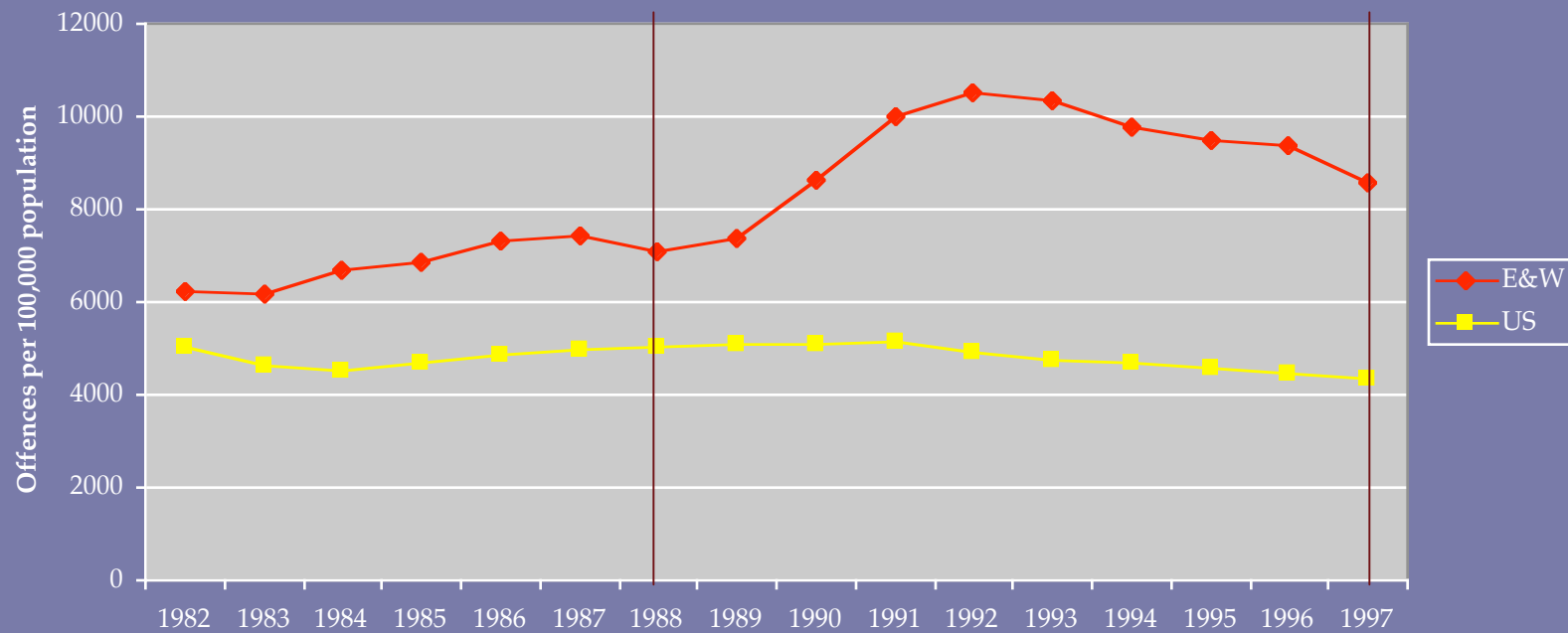
Violent crime in increasing in England and Wales

Fig. 2. Violent Crime Rates in England and the US



Property crime has increased in England and Wales

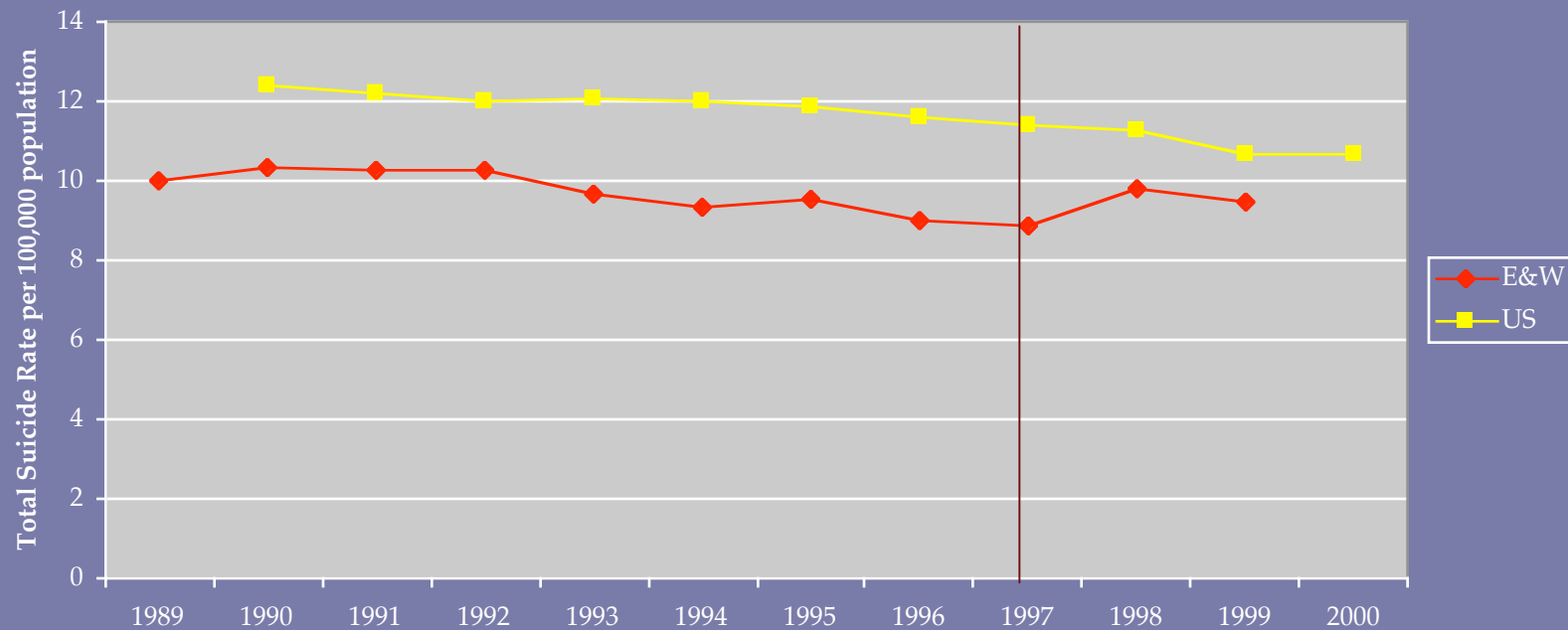
Fig. 3. Property Crime Rates in England and the US



Sources: Home Office and FBI, 2001

Suicide is declining in both England and Wales and in the US

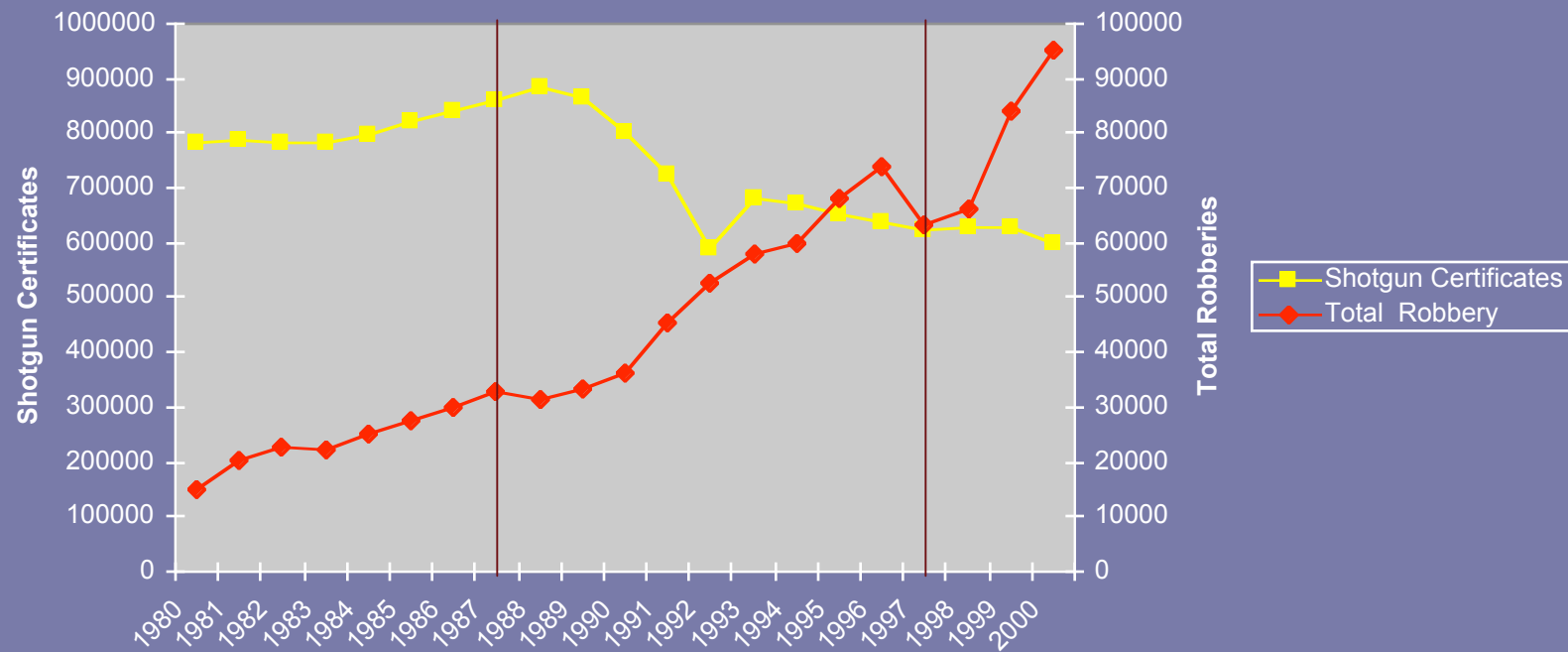
Fig. 4. Suicide Rates in England and Wales vs. the US



Sources: McIntosh, 2000; National Statistics Online, 2003

Robbery is increasing but legal shotgun ownership is decreasing

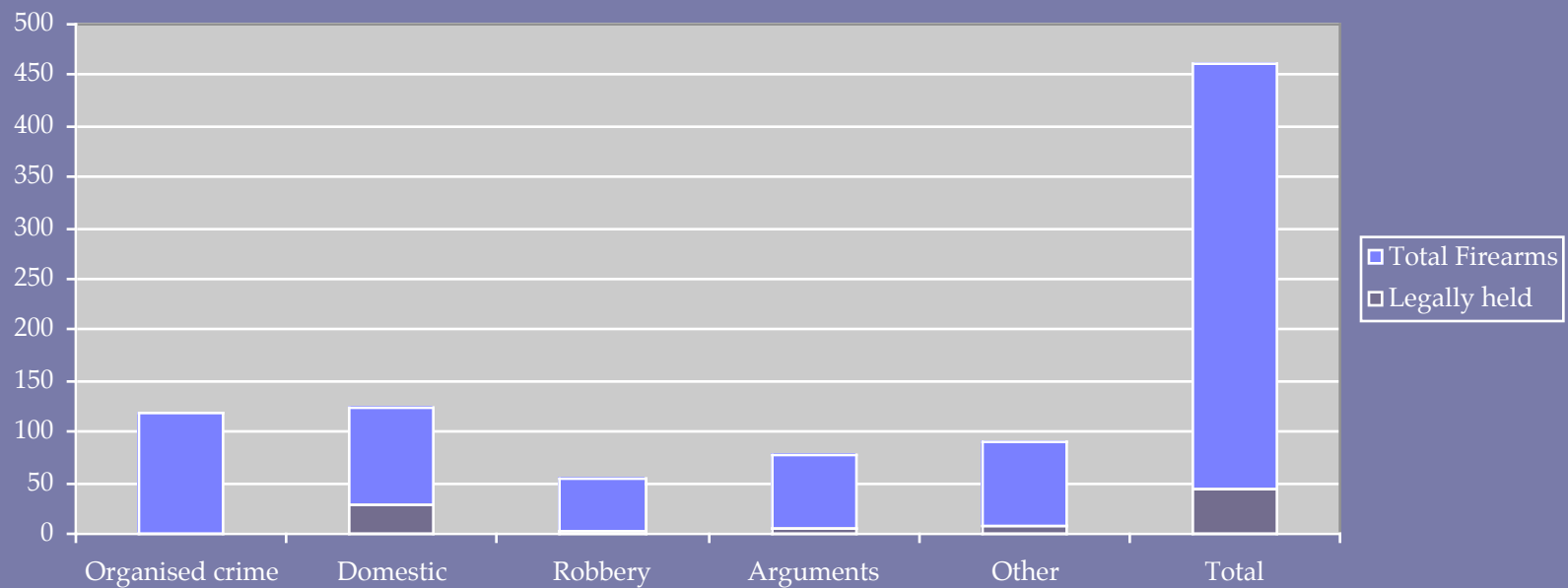
Fig. 5. Shotgun Certificates and Robberies, E & W



Source: Greenwood, 2001

Very few firearms used in homicide are legal

Fig. 6. Legal Status of Firearm in Firearm Homicide, England and Wales, 1992-1998



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

Australia

Australian firearms legislation

- In 1997, government brought in sweeping firearms legislation following shootings in Tasmania
- Prohibited and confiscated semi-automatic firearms,
- Introduced new licencing and registration regulations

Fig. 7. Homicide is flat in Australia

Trend in homicide

Figure 8

Number of homicides by month, 1995–2001

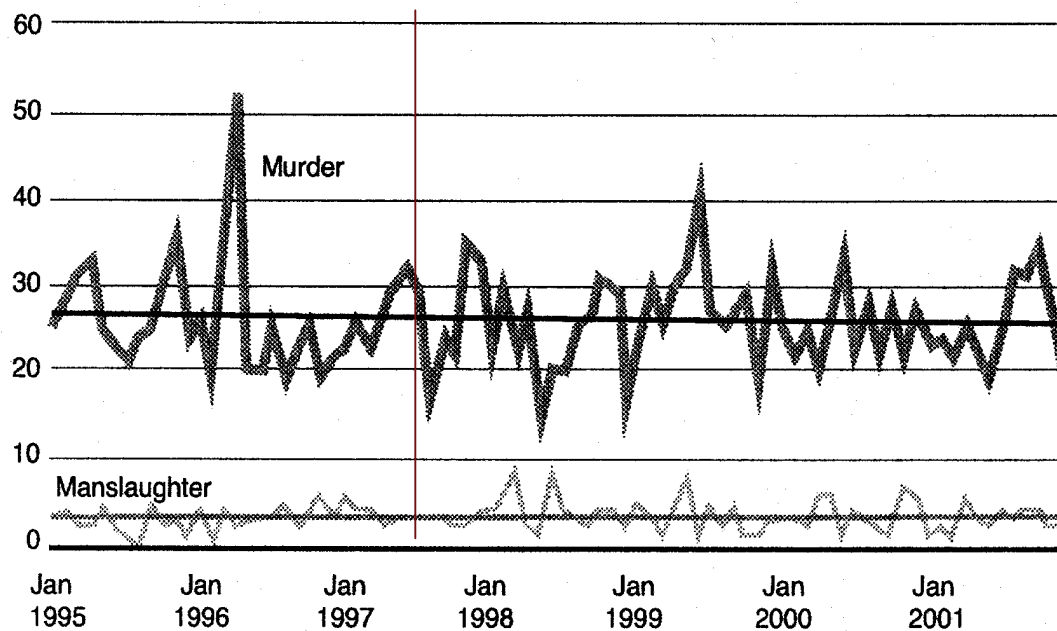


Fig. 8. Violent crime is increasing in Australia

Violent crime

Violent crime comprises homicide, assault, sexual assault and robbery.

Figure 2

Violent crimes recorded by police, rate per 100,000 persons, 1995–2001

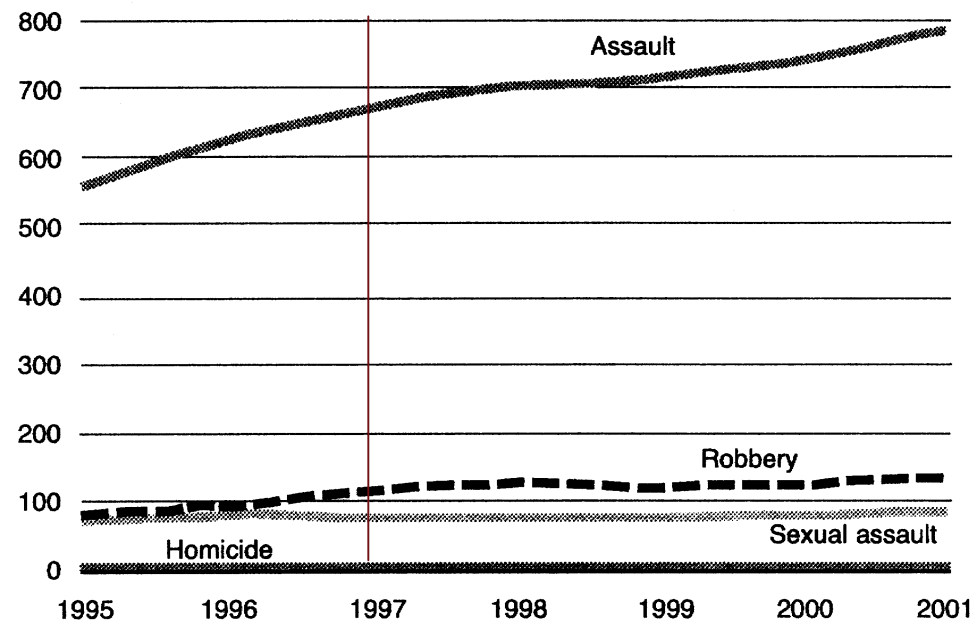
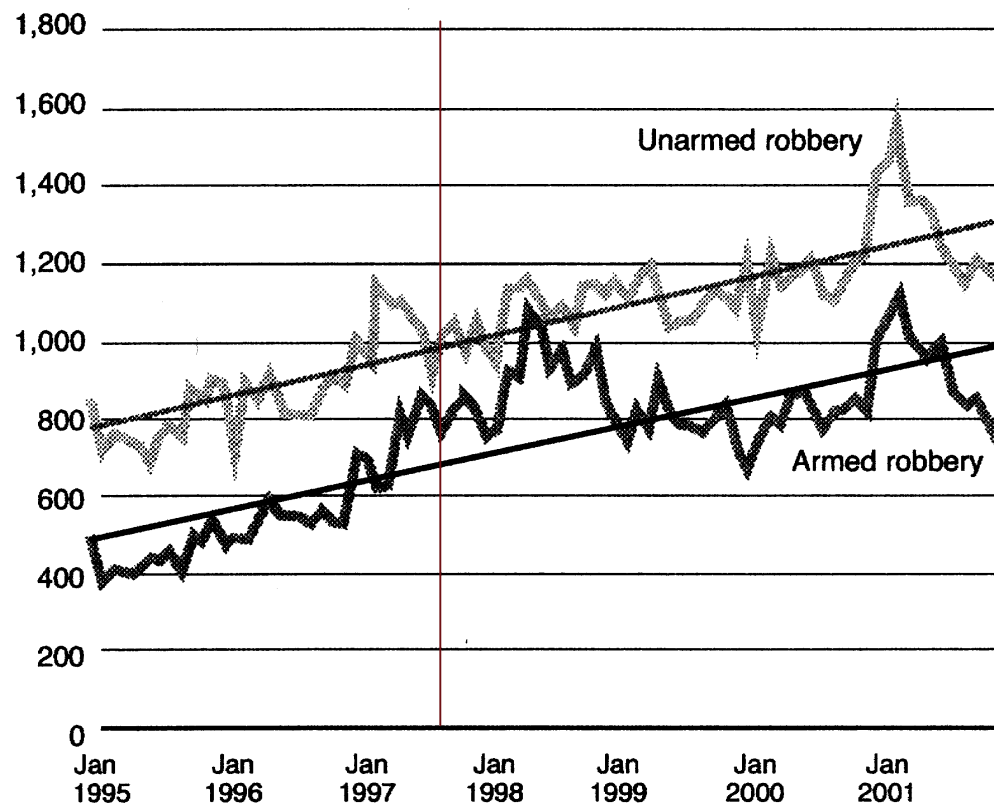


Fig. 9. Robbery is increasing in Australia

Trend in robbery

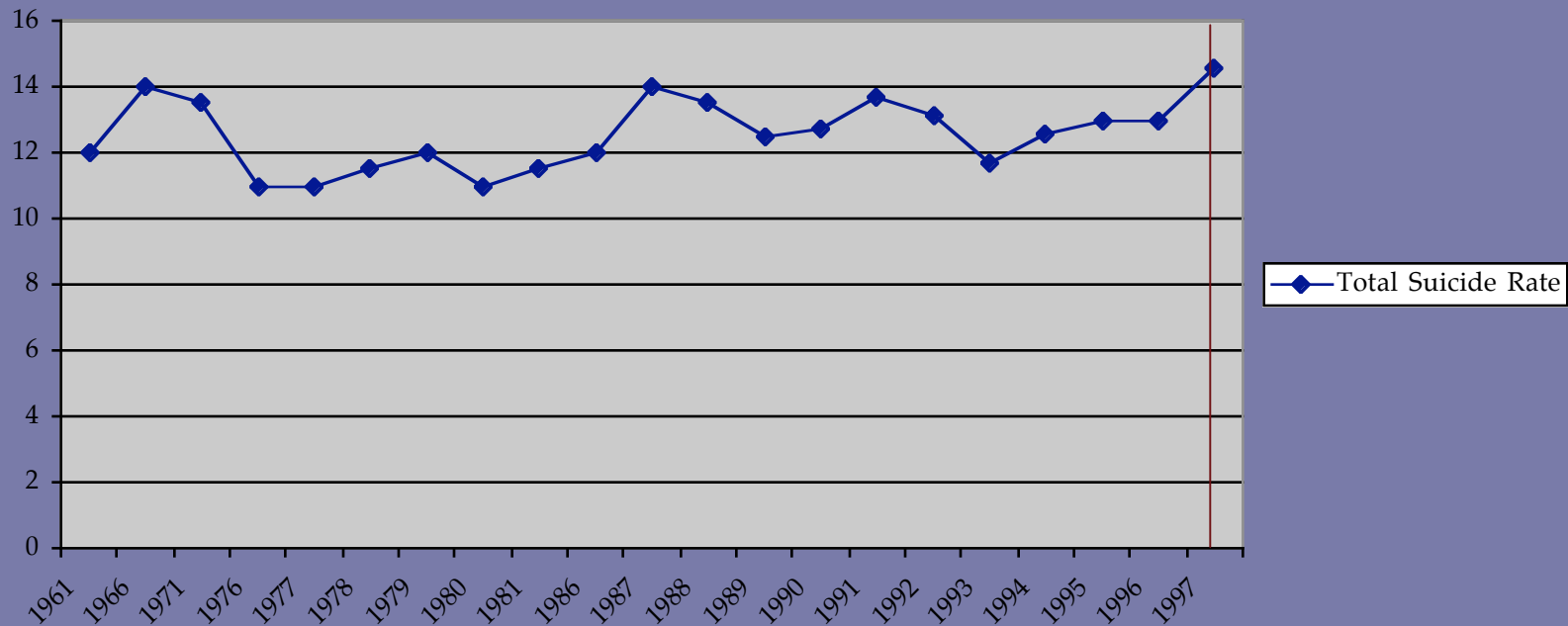
Figure 20

Number of robbery victims, by month, 1995–2001



Suicide is increasing in Australia

Figure 10. Australian Suicide Rate per 100,000



Source: ABS Year Book Suicide 2002

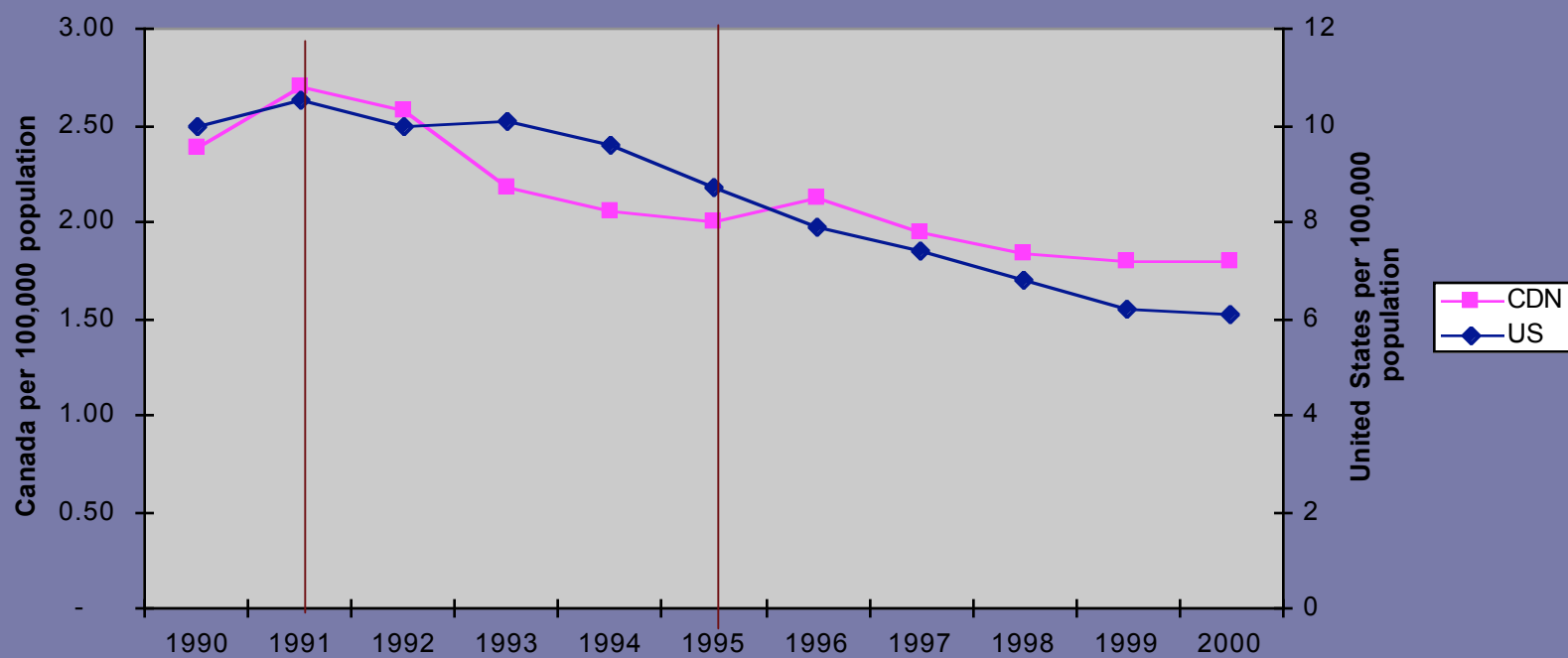
Canada

Canadian firearms legislation

- 1977, introduced police screening for firearm purchasers, eliminated 'defence of property' as legal reason for handgun
- 1991, stiffer rules for firearm ownership, prohibited variety of firearms, magazines
- 1995, introduced owner licencing and firearm registration

Homicide is decreasing in both Canada and in the US

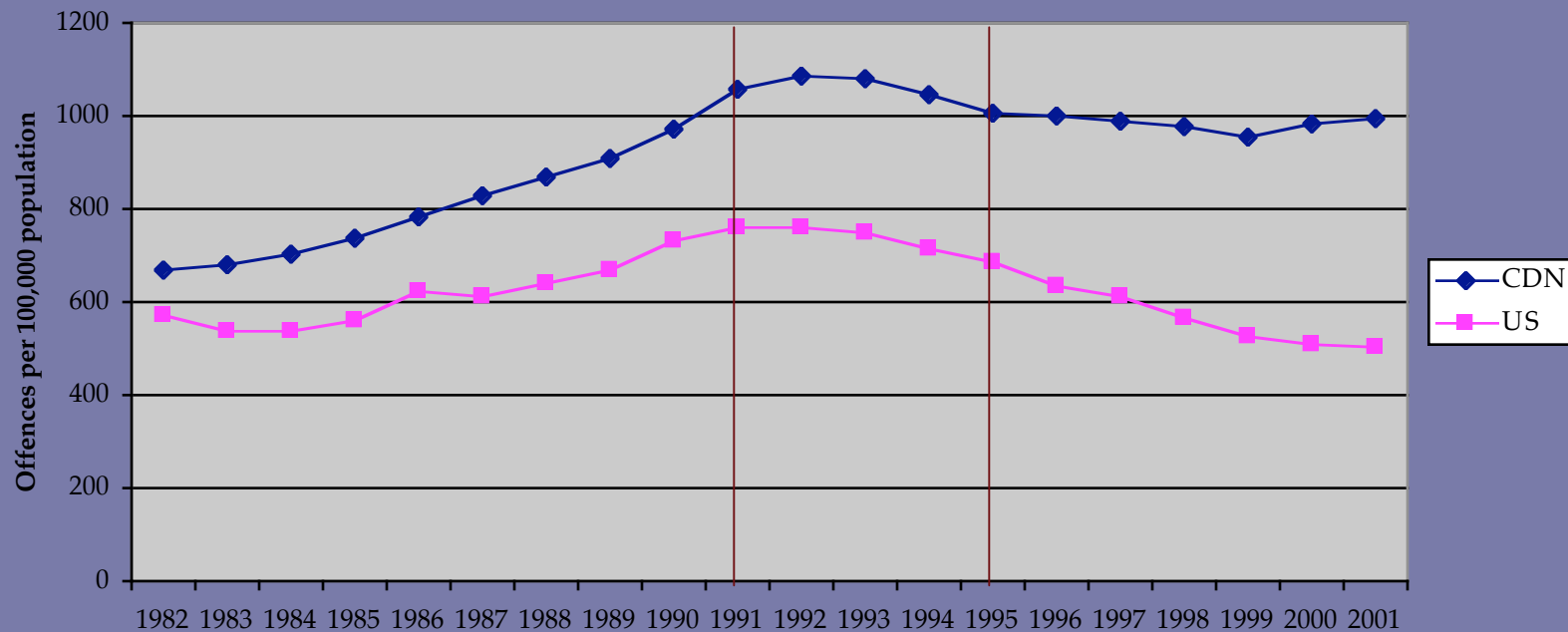
Fig. 11. Homicide Rates in Canada and the United States



Sources: Firearm Stats, DOJ, 2000; FBI, Index of Crime, 2003

Violent crime is increasing in Canada, but decreasing in the US

Fig. 12. Violent Crime Rates in Canada and the United States



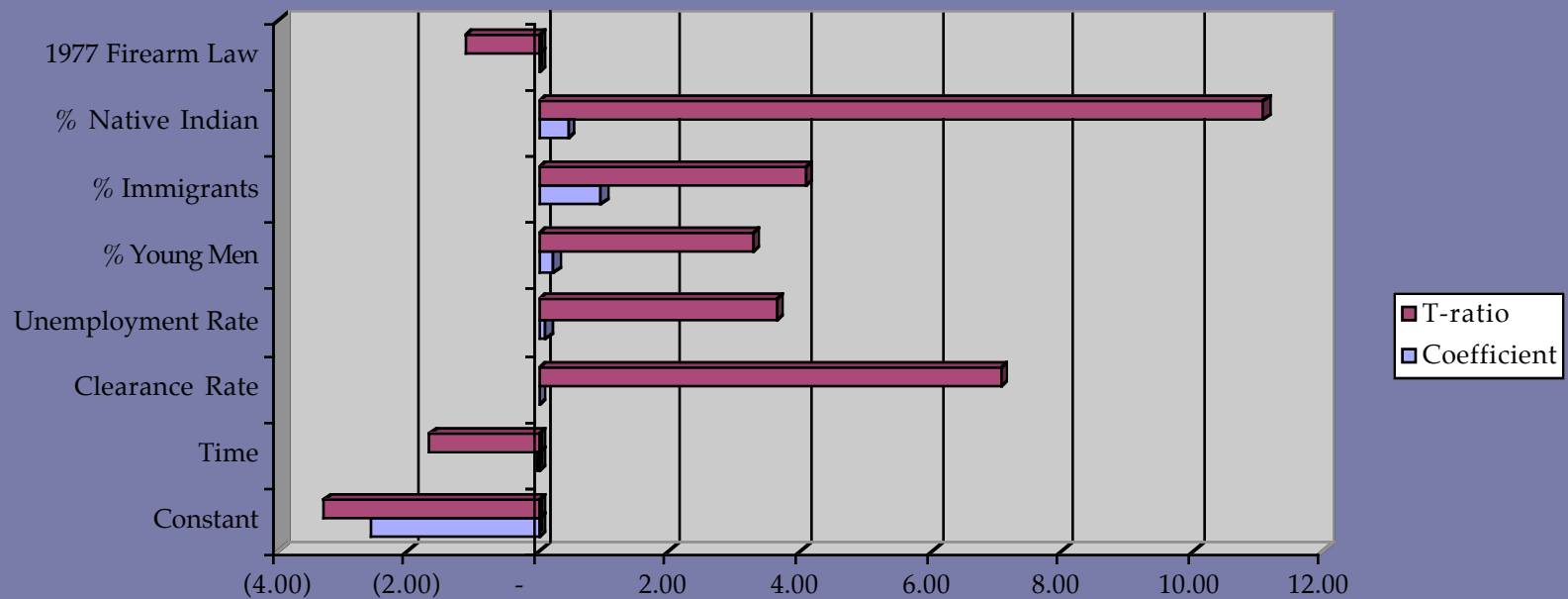
Sources: Juristat, 2002; FBI, 2002

Two econometric analyses

- Twenty-plus year time series analyses, and all 10 provinces
- Variables jutting to right have a positive effect
- Variables jutting to left have a negative effect

1977 gun law had an insignificant effect on homicide rates

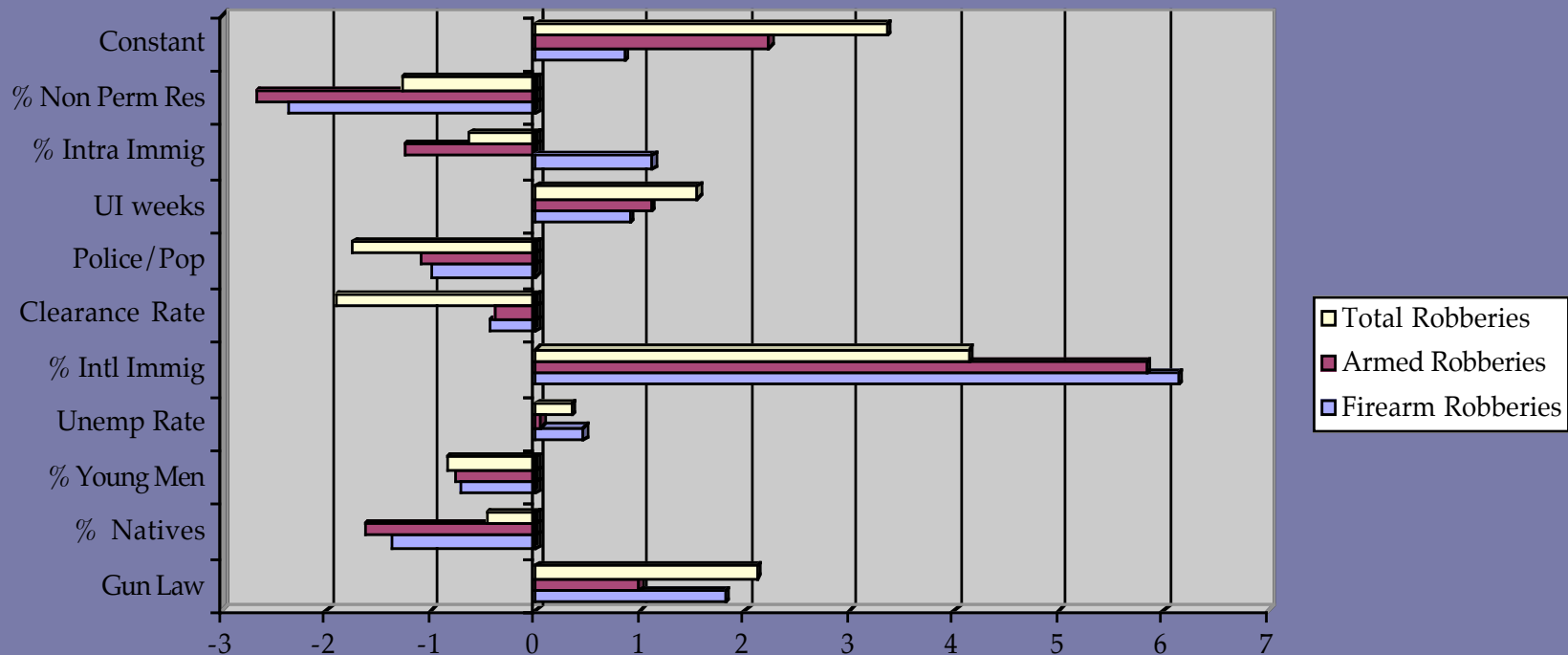
Fig. 13. Evaluating the 1977 Canadian Firearms Law: Homicide



Source: Mauser and Holmes (1992)

1977 gun law had a marginally significant positive effect on robbery

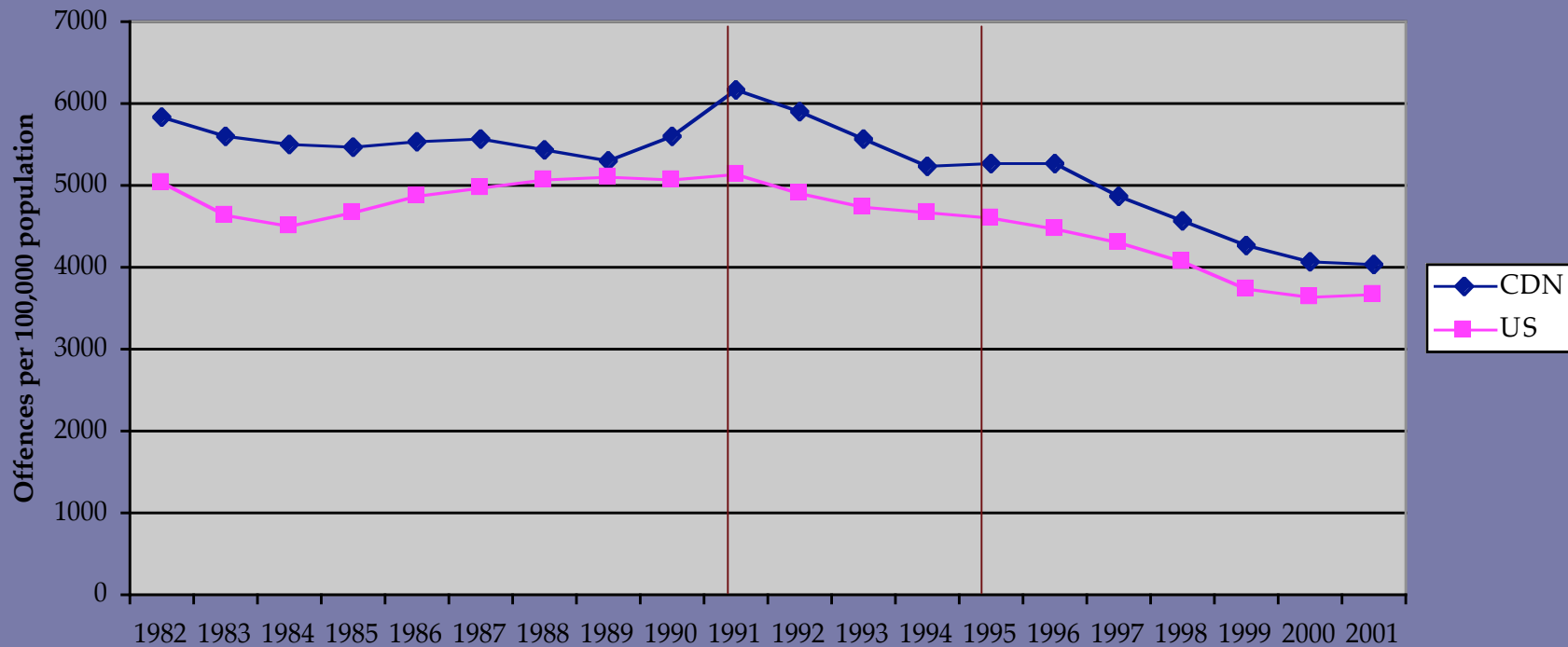
Fig. 14. Evaluating the 1977 Canadian Firearms Law: Robbery



Source: Mauser and Maki (2003)

Property crime is decreasing in both Canada and in the US

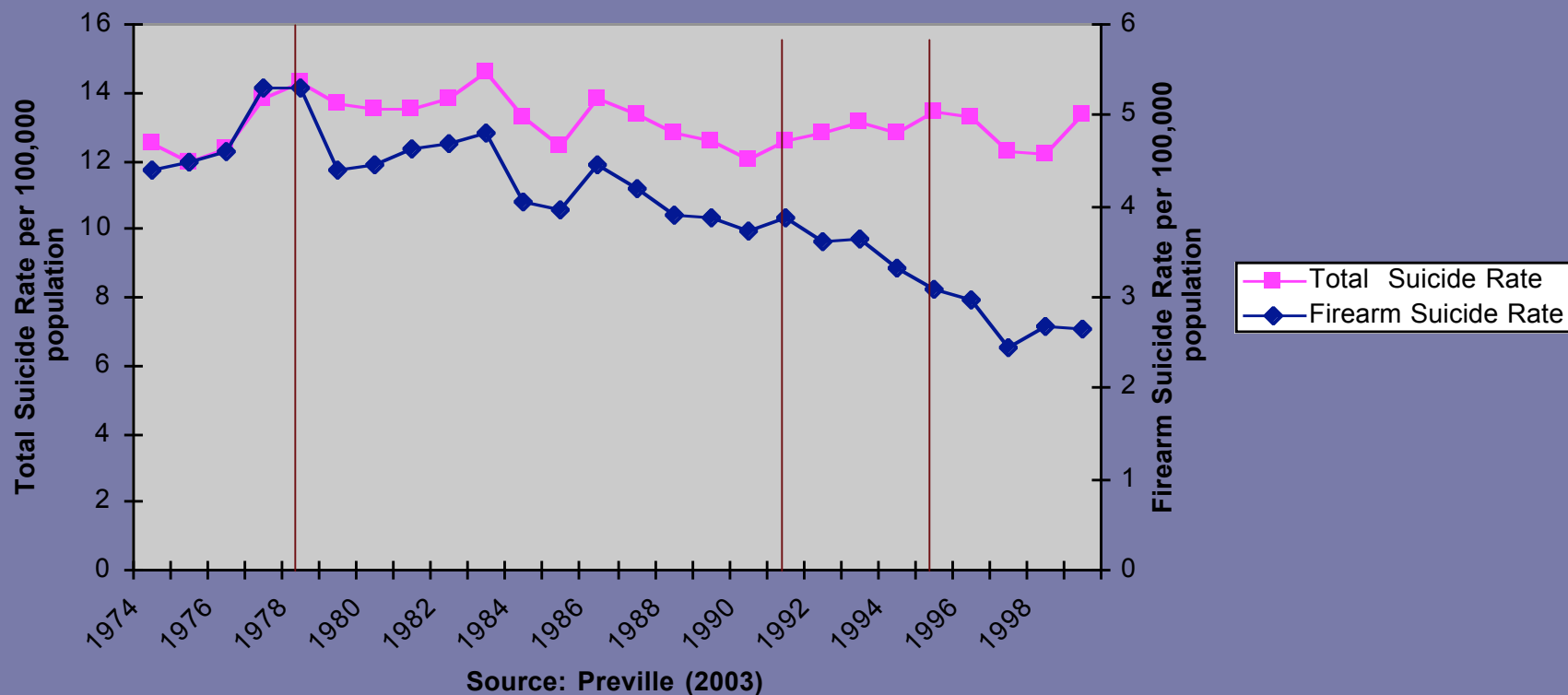
Fig. 15. Property Crime in Canada and the United States



Sources: Juristat, 2002; FBI, 2002

Decline in firearm suicide rate does not reduce total suicide rate

Fig. 16. Firearms and Suicide in Canada



Recent Canadian firearms regulations

- Auditor General estimated cost to date as at least \$1 billion CDN
- Originally estimated to cost \$2 million CDN
- No visible effect on crime rates or suicide rates

Conclusions

- No evidence that restrictive firearm regulations has reduced violent crime or suicide rates
- Only the United States has witnessed a dramatic drop in criminal violence

More research needed

- More comparative time trends
- More econometric analyses

Tentative conclusions

- Public disarmament is ineffective, and expensive,
- Politically divisive, and it undermines public support for the police,
- Morally questionable -- disarming victims