

# NationMaster Blog

MEASURING AND DOCUMENTING A WORLD OF CHANGE

HAVARD BERGO

MARCH 30, 2014

## The secret of Japan's mysteriously low crime rate

Japan is often considered slightly *odd* compared to other countries. Its economic success, distinct culture and disciplined population has made Japan rather unique, and produced one of the lowest [crime rates](#) in the world. The country has 127 million people yet street crime is almost unheard of; the [murder rate](#) is only lower in tiny Monaco and Palau, and the use of drugs is minimal compared to other industrialized countries. The Japanese intolerance to illicit drugs – seen as evidence of bad personal character – were demonstrated with the [national outrage](#) that followed when two well-known sumo wrestlers tested positive for marijuana in 2008.

A Japanese friend of mine explained that going to prison would be an unimaginable social stigma for most people, leading to a widespread public perception that crimes are mostly [committed](#) by foreigners. The belief that almost all Japanese are law-abiding also creates a system that routinely treats suspects as guilty until proven otherwise. In such a hierarchical and deferential society, suspects face enormous pressure to cooperate with the investigators and admitting guilt, leading to a conviction rate in the courts of [more than 99%](#). The criminal justice system is founded on a strong belief that the criminal must repent for his crime – not simply being punished the law – and Japanese prisons are well-known (or notorious) for their strict discipline and order.



Japan: Many people, no crimes.

It is a undisputed fact that Japan has achieved a remarkable

safe society compared to other industrialized countries, and they incarcerate far fewer than for instance the UK (with a prisoner rate 3 times higher) or the US (13 times higher). Yet it is also a carefully maintained image that ignores many darker aspect of the Japanese society. Its modern surface often doesn't extend to social attitudes towards women in this male-dominated culture. Unlike the rare violent crimes, sexual assaults are said to be widespread and severely underreported. The existence of [chikan](#) ("perverts", meaning men groping women in public) is a massive problem and has led to the creation of "women-only" carriages in most major cities. Japanese police are also criticized for failing to take victims of sexual crimes seriously time and again as a result of either chauvinist bias or an inability to investigate such crimes.

What are most disturbing are however arguments that the low crime is partially a result of a police culture that are obsessed with [keeping crime statistics low](#). Former detectives claim that police is unwilling to investigate homicides unless there is a clear suspects and frequently labels unnatural deaths as suicides without performing autopsies. Coincidentally, Japan has one of the highest suicide rates in the world.



Sexual crimes are widespread in Japan



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3 COMMENTS

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## Comments



**DAFUQ SAYS:**  
[APRIL 3, 2014 AT 7:17 PM](#)

Less testosterone+less Christianity (forgiveness of all sin and free pass to kill)=less crime,can be seen in Sweden, Japan etc.

REPLY



**DAVID MANE SAYS:**  
[APRIL 29, 2014 AT 12:48 PM](#)

Dafuq I've got no idea about testosterone levels among Japanese or the how much being Christian increases crime in society but I've been to Japan about 8 times to see the wife's family and there's nothing like it. Drop your wallet and someone'll hunt you down to return it. Front doors left open everywhere and children and old people walking everywhere without a thought. Stay for a week and honesty, and hard work too seem very normal. My guess is it's cultural, taught at Mum's knee and it makes their xenophobia and nationalist superiority seem pretty reasonable. I've been in Tokyo at different periods when there large groups of Iranians, then later there were Koreans then Chinese and there was crime. I think that all that actually happened was that what would be a normal proportion of criminals in any other country than Japan turned up in these groups and hey presto Tokyo crime wave.

REPLY



**DREW SAYS:**  
[MAY 29, 2014 AT 2:56 AM](#)

You either didn't read or didn't understand this article, Fawkes.

REPLY

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