



Labour's record in crime

Source briefing for the *We Can't Afford Labour* advertisement

Purpose

This briefing paper provides the source information supporting the claims made in the Sensible Sentencing Trust advertisement released as part of the *We Can't Afford Labour* campaign. It is intended for publication alongside the advertisement on the campaign website.

Summary

The advertisement argues that the previous Labour Government prioritised reducing the prison population and weakening consequences rather than reducing crime. The supplied evidence shows that, over the relevant period, retail crime nearly doubled, gang membership increased by 75 percent, youth offending increased by 21 percent, ram raids increased by more than 550 percent, and recorded victims of crime more than doubled.

Evidence behind the advertisement

Advert claim	Evidence	Source
Prison population target	The Government targeted a 30 percent reduction in the prison population. The prison population fell from 10,649 in March 2018 to 8,893 in September 2023, a 17 percent decrease.	Newsroom, New prison strategy, new population reduction target (2019); Department of Corrections, Prison facts and statistics.
Retail crime doubled	Reported retail crime increased from 54,374 incidents in 2018 to 108,588 in 2022, a 99.7 percent increase.	Written Parliamentary Question 52 (2023), Hon Paul Goldsmith to the Minister of Police.
Gang rehabilitation funding	The advertisement refers to Government-supported gang-based rehabilitation programmes and criticism that the programmes could benefit gang leaders financially.	RNZ, Relapse reports upset gang-based rehab programme (2022); Police Association, Mob-led rehab will only 'line the pockets of gang leaders' (2021); Stuff, Anti-drug Mongrel Mob's man was meth kingpin (2022).
Gang members up 75 percent	Reported gang membership increased from 5,343 in October 2017 to 9,366 by December 2023, a 75.29 percent increase.	Written Parliamentary Question 4643 (2021), Simeon Brown to the Minister of Police; RNZ, Is the government playing 'fast and loose' with gang numbers? (November 2024).
Youth offending up 21 percent	Youth offending increased by 21 percent between June 2022 and June 2023.	Ministry for Children, Serious youth offending reduction target achieved (October 2025).
Ram raids up 550 percent	Recorded ram raids increased from 136 in 2018 to 886 in 2022, a 551.5 percent increase.	Written Parliamentary Question 5517 (2023), Hon Mark Mitchell to the Minister of Police.
Victims of crime doubled	Recorded victims of crime increased from 174,059 in 2018 to 389,083 in 2022, a 124 percent increase. The advertisement uses the rounded formulation 'doubled'.	Victimisations by Police Boundary and Month, OIA investigations at 180 days, Policedata.nz (2026).
Consequences and sentencing	The advertisement's line that Labour 'didn't cut crime, they cut consequences' refers to the repeal of the Three Strikes law and the use of Section 27 cultural reports and sentencing discounts.	One News, Parliament votes to scrap three strikes law (August 2022); Public Interest Law Journal of New Zealand, Section 27 Past, Present and Future Potential (2023); Hon Paul Goldsmith, Section 27 reports returning to original purpose (March 2024).

Publication notes

- The advertisement uses rounded language where appropriate. In particular, 'retail crime doubled' refers to a 99.7 percent increase, 'victims of crime doubled' refers to a 124 percent increase, and 'ram raids up 550 percent' refers to a 551.5 percent increase.
- The prison figure should not be presented as a 30 percent reduction. Thirty percent was the stated target; the supplied Corrections figures show a 17 percent reduction between March 2018 and September 2023.
- Before publication, each source should be linked to the underlying article, parliamentary question, official dataset or ministerial release on the website.

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