

“Increased use of technology is the main reason why crimes have changed since 1900.” Do you agree? Explain your answer.

The nature of crime changed significantly in the 20th century. Many activities were legislated against and other, former crimes, were legalised. Technology played an important part in changing crime in the 20th century, but, in my opinion, changing attitudes – in government and society as a whole – were more important.

The increased use of computers and mobile phones led to a number of new crimes being defined in the 20th and 21st centuries. Cybercrime – crime that is carried out using the internet and other digital technologies – has become common. Computers have been used to steal money from bank accounts or to hack the private records of individuals or governments to steal information. People have also deliberately introduced viruses to destroy vitally important information. This can ruin businesses. The internet also makes copyright theft – illegal downloads of music, films etc. – much more easy and widespread. Cyberbullying, a new phenomenon, although not specifically a crime, is illegal under many other 20th century laws such as the Malicious Communications Act of 1988. The role of technology in this type of crime is clear-cut.

Since 1900, motor car crime has grown into one of the biggest categories of crime, particularly amongst teenage boys. In 1900, the car had only just been invented, but technological advances meant that by the mid 20th century, cars were being mass produced, opening up new opportunities for crime. In 1996, there were over 1.5 million car crimes – including drink driving, breaking the speed limit and half a million car thefts. Although technology was essential in developing the car, changing attitudes towards crime, for example drink-driving, have meant that since the 1970s, certain car related crimes have been taken much more seriously.

It was more liberal attitudes which led to former crimes, such as abortion and homosexuality, being decriminalised. Until 1967, terminating a pregnancy was illegal in Britain. If a woman wanted to end a pregnancy she would have to resort to a ‘backstreet abortion’ which posed significant dangers to her health. This threat and the Thalidomide disaster of the 1960s, led to calls for the law to be changed; which was through the Abortion Act. Homosexuality was also illegal in the UK until 1967 when the Sexual Offences Act decriminalised homosexuality for men aged over 21. This followed a long campaign by a reform group who had new, liberal attitudes towards sex.

Changing attitudes are most evident when looking at crimes relating to marriage and relationships. In the 19th century, the common view was that men were the dominant partners in relationships. Violence in relationships was seen as the couple’s personal business. However, women’s contributions to the war efforts and the campaign for equal rights, contributed to changing attitudes and subsequent changes in the law. In 1976, the Domestic Violence Act gave victims of domestic violence the right to ask for an injunction against a violent partner and in 1991 rape within marriage was criminalised. Society’s rejection of the view that a man had authority over a woman in a relationship was endorsed in a 2014 law which made controlling and coercive behaviour towards a partner a crime.

Although I agree that technology was important in changing crime in the 20th century, changing attitudes had a more significant impact. New crimes connected to technology, such as drink driving and cyberbullying, became seen as socially unacceptable and are therefore considered to be serious offences. The exact timing of other changes to crime connected to sex and relationships, drugs and race relations, have been wholly dependent on changing attitudes in government and society as a whole.

“Royal control over law enforcement increased during the period from the Norman Conquest to the end of the Tudor period.” How far do you agree? (16+4)

The period from the Norman Conquest to the end of the Tudor period saw a marked increase in royal control over law enforcement, partly from the need of usurper kings such as William the Conqueror to establish their authority, and partly as a necessity because of the growing population. The Church’s influence over law enforcement rivalled royal control throughout the period, but over time the role of local communities in enforcing the law gradually diminished.

On the one hand, I agree with this statement because the Norman usurper, William the Conqueror, needed to increase royal control over law enforcement in order to establish his authority. This was the beginning of a centralisation of law enforcement which continued through the later Medieval period and into the Tudor period. William rearranged law enforcement along the lines of his new feudal system, which concentrated land and power into the hands of loyal Norman lords. Castles were built to give these lords control over local communities. Challenges to the feudal system, for example in York and East Anglia, were met with extreme punishments, such as the Harrying of the North.

I also agree with this statement because centralisation of law enforcement continued into the later Middle Ages as a result of the growing population. The growth of towns in the 13th and 14th centuries meant there was more opportunities for crime than in small village communities, so royal control increased in order to deal with it. Government-appointed officials became more important in law enforcement, and the local officials known as ‘tythingmen’ during the Saxon period became known as ‘constables’. The role of constables and night watches increased in the Tudor period, and Justices of the Peace were also appointed by Elizabeth in a bid to enforce laws. While constables were poorly paid and JPs were not paid at all, these were the first steps towards a professional paid police force.

On the other hand, the Church rivalled and sometimes hindered royal control over law enforcement. The Church claimed the right to try any churchman accused of a crime in their own courts, as opposed to the royal courts everyone else went to. Many non-churchmen claimed the benefit of the clergy, the right to be tried in the church court if they could read a verse from the Bible. Trial by ordeal, which had begun in the Saxon period, continued to be used until 1215 when it was ended by Pope Innocent III. Henry II and Thomas Becket’s dispute over Church courts suggests that in Medieval times the Church had more control over law enforcement than the king, but Henry VIII’s break from Rome in the 1500s marked a significant shift towards royal power. With the monarch as the new head of the Church, royal and religious control over law enforcement were arguably synonymous.

Finally, I also disagree with the statement because the role of local communities continued to be important in law enforcement throughout the period, if diminished. The hue and cry continued to be used throughout the Medieval period and the Tudor period, and tithings were still used in Norman times to encourage men to look out for each other’s good behaviour. In the Tudor period, if a person was robbed, it was his or her responsibility to get an arrest warrant from the magistrate, then track the criminal down themselves and deliver them to the constable.;

In conclusion, the period from the Norman Conquest to the end of the Tudor period marks a significant shift towards increased royal control of law enforcement. While the Church was a rival to royal power for most of the period, Henry VIII’s break from Rome ultimately shows royal dominance over the Church. The role of communities remained important but their power was gradually diminished over time. In all, I agree with the statement that royal control over law enforcement increased, to the extent that it became a much more significant factor than at the start of the Norman period.

'The use of public execution remained an important feature of the penal system in the years c1500–c1900.' How far do you agree? Explain your answer.

The use of public executions was an important deterrent between the periods 1500-1900. I agree with this statement to an extent in that the number of crimes punishable by hanging increased during the 1600 and 1700s. However, new methods of punishment such as prisons and transportation increasingly replaced public executions by the end of the 19th century.

Public executions were incredibly common in 17th century where a whole range of crimes such as vagabondage and poaching were punishable by death. This was known as the Bloody Code with 225 crimes punishable with death by 1815. The main purpose of hanging was to deter further crime as the crowd would see the consequences of breaking the law. The most severe crimes like treason involved hanging, drawing and quartering the criminal, as was the case with the Gunpowder Plotters in 1605. Yet, by the 1800s, attitudes towards the Bloody Code had begun to change as politicians who believed they encouraged immoral behaviour increasingly saw public executions as a cause for concern. Therefore, the use of public executions became less common and by 1868 hangings only happened in private.

Another important feature of the penal system that existed in the 18th to 19th centuries was transportation. Criminals would be sent to colonies like Australia where it was believed that hard labour for seven or more years would reform a criminal's character. By 1833, over 6000 prisoners were sent to Australia. For the most part petty criminals were transported but even murderers could have their sentences reduced from death to transportation. Despite the cost to the government, transportation had some success in reforming criminals and presented an alternative to execution, as juries were more likely to convict criminals if the sentence was not death. Additionally, removing the criminal from society altogether prevented them from influencing others into committing crime.

However, the biggest change to the penal system was the use of prison as a punishment. Attitudes towards punishment were changing as increasingly philosophers and thinkers felt that the punishment should fit the crime. Humanitarians like John Howard and Elizabeth Fry persuaded the government to improve the prison system by educating prisoners and improving their conditions. The goal was to reform the criminal rather than execute them. In the 1840s, new prisons like Pentonville were built as a model for future prisons with more being built to accommodate the increasing number of criminals convicted in the period. Criminals were separated based on gender and the severity of their crime and prisoners were worked to encourage them to leave behind their criminal ways. As a result of these changes prisons became the main form of punishment by the end of the 19th century.

In conclusion, public executions were not an important part of the penal system by the end of the 19th century. As attitudes towards crime changed and politicians came to realise that the Bloody Code was not working, other methods of punishment were created that aimed to reform the prisoner as well as punish them for their crimes. With the creation of the Police Force in the 19th century the fear of arrest replaced public execution as the main deterrent for crime.