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Cities post stable rate in homicides

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TORONTO – Sensational killings punctuated 1995, from grisly slayings of elderly couples in both Montreal and Toronto to the terror campaign of a serial attacker in Abbotsford, B.C.

But the number of slayings in Canadian cities remained stable over the past year – a sharp contrast to the United States.

Toronto dropped from 85 to 74 in 1995, Montreal from 75 to 60, Vancouver from 48 to 30, Edmonton from 24 to 19, and Winnipeg from 18 to 16. Slayings in the Ottawa region rose slightly from 17 to 23, and Calgary recorded 18 for the second year in a row.

"In Canada generally the overall homicide rate has been remarkably stable," said Rosemary Gartner, a professor of criminal law at the University of Toronto. "And the characteristics of those killings have remained stable as well – strangers still only make up 10 to 15 per cent of murderers."

Ms. Gartner said homicide statistics are a reliable way to draw a distinction between Canada and the United States since they are usually reported accurately.

Data for 1994 showed an average 2.04 people per 100,000 citizens were killed in Canada, compared with 9.03 in the United States. In Gary, Ind., a city of only 116,000,

130 killings were reported in 1995.

"Canada has stable cultural attributes which are only likely to change in the long run," Ms. Gartner said.

While gun control and antidrug programs were embraced in 1995 as means of curbing crime in the long run, Ms. Gartner said doom-and-gloom predictions about the safety of Canadians are rarely well grounded.

"There's a lot of incentive for politicians, police forces and special-interest groups to create a moral panic about crime," she said. "But studies show that public statements about crime are more related to the economic climate than the actual crime rate."