

Physical Safety

The PSI monitors Canadians' concerns about physical safety by tracking four indicators: the level of violent crime, the level of property crime, and Canadians' perceptions of these types of crime in their own communities.

Highlights:

According to the hard data, Canadians' physical safety continued to improve in 2000, but public perceptions improved only slightly. This may be partly explained by gaps in the official reporting of crime data, and by media coverage of crime. Those who feel most unsafe are the most vulnerable citizens – women, seniors and low-income people, (who feel more vulnerable on the economic and health indicators as well).

Violent crime rates continue to drop

Research shows that the fear of crime – particularly violent crime – is disproportionate to the true risk of being victimized. But even if people's fear of crime is “not justified,” it nonetheless exists and can be a negative factor in their lives, often unnecessarily restricting their social activities.

The PSI includes the most serious forms of violent crime – that is, homicide, attempted murder, aggravated assault, and aggravated sexual assault – because these are the crimes about which Canadians express the greatest concerns and the seriousness of these crimes leads to more reliable and comprehensive reporting.

DATA:

- ⇒ Violent crime in all its forms has been decreasing since 1992. In 1999, the rate fell to 955 per 100,000 persons – the lowest rate of the decade.
- ⇒ Violent crime rates were highest in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, where the rates exceeded 1,500 per 100,000 population in 1999.
- ⇒ The lowest rates were in Quebec and Prince Edward Island.
- ⇒ Although the national rate decreased in 1999, Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Quebec all recorded at least a 3% increase in their provincial rates.
- ⇒ The homicide rate in 1999 remained stable at 1.8 per 100,000 population, its lowest level in over 20 years, and the attempted murder rate was down to 2.2 per 100,000 people.
- ⇒ Men were the victims in 75% of aggravated assaults, nearly two-thirds of assaults with a deadly weapon, 68% of homicides and 73% of attempted murders.

⇒ More than 85% of the victims of sexual assault were women. In assault cases, women were most often attacked by their spouse or ex-spouse (40%), a casual acquaintance (18%), or a close friend (11%).

⇒ For male victims of assault, their assailants were most often strangers (32%) or a casual acquaintance (31%).

PERCEPTION: Are Canadians concerned about violent crime?

To gauge Canadians' sense of their physical safety, we asked how they would rate their families' safety in their own neighbourhoods with respect to violent crime.

⇒ The majority of Canadians (74%) in 2000 said they felt very safe from violent crime

⇒ By region, residents of the Atlantic Provinces and Alberta felt the safest: 79% felt very safe, while only 4% felt unsafe.

⇒ Residents of Quebec were the most fearful of crime in their neighbourhoods: only 64% felt very safe, while 9% were fearful of violent crime in their neighbourhood. (This may reflect widespread media coverage of biker gang violence.)

⇒ Canadians aged 25 to 44 were most likely to feel that their neighbourhoods were very safe (77%), followed by young people under age 25 (74%) and those aged 45 to 64 (73%).

⇒ Seniors were the *least likely* to feel that their neighbourhoods were very safe from violent crime. Only 67% of senior respondents felt very safe, 28% felt moderately safe, and only 5% felt that their neighbourhoods were not safe. Other research suggests that the more active seniors are, the higher perceptions of physical safety they tend to have.

⇒ Men were more likely than women to report that their neighbourhoods were very safe (76% vs. 72%).

⇒ Canadians with higher household incomes were significantly more likely than other Canadians to feel that their neighbourhoods were very safe. Eighty per cent of Canadian households with incomes of \$80,000 or more felt that their neighbourhoods were very safe from violent crime, while only 60% of Canadians with incomes under \$20,000 felt the same way.

Property crime rate leveling off

Property crimes are unlawful acts with the intent of gaining property, but they do not involve the use or threat of violence. The overall incidence of property crime has been declining since 1992. PSI focuses on two types of property crime that affect people most directly – breaking and entering into a residence and motor vehicle theft.

DATA:

- ⇒ In 1999, the incidence of property crime in Canada decreased overall.
- ⇒ Property crime rates increased in the Atlantic Provinces, while rates in the rest of Canada declined in 1999.
- ⇒ Even though rates increased in the Atlantic, the incidence of property crime there is still the lowest in the country, with rates in Prince Edward Island the lowest for all of Canada.
- ⇒ Break and entry and motor vehicle theft accounted for 28% of all property crime in Canada in 1999, and combined, they occurred at a rate of 1,178 per 100,000 population (a drop of about 8% from 1998).
- ⇒ Youth between the ages of 12 and 17 were charged in 38% of the cases of break and entry in 1999 and in 40% of motor vehicle thefts. A decline in the size of this age group may partly explain the decline in property crime rates.

PERCEPTION: How worried are Canadians about property crime?

- ⇒ 68% of Canadians considered their neighbourhood to be very safe in terms of property crime in 2000, up from 64% per cent in 1999.
- ⇒ Another 22% considered their neighbourhood to be moderately safe, and 11% considered their neighbourhoods to be unsafe (about the same as in 1999).
- ⇒ Men were slightly more likely than women to believe their neighbourhoods were very safe (69% vs. 67%), but men were also slightly more likely to believe that their neighbourhoods were unsafe (12% vs. 10%).
- ⇒ As was the case with violent crime, Canadians in higher income households were much more likely to believe that their neighbourhoods were very safe from property crime, while that sense of security decreased with household income levels.
- ⇒ 76% of households with incomes over \$80,000 per year said their neighbourhoods were very safe from property crime; only 9% reported feeling unsafe.
- ⇒ By contrast, 57% of those with household incomes less than \$20,000 per year said their neighbourhoods were very safe, while 13% felt their neighbourhoods were unsafe.
- ⇒ Regionally, 77% of Alberta residents felt very safe and only 6% felt unsafe.
- ⇒ Quebec had the lowest proportion of residents who felt their neighbourhoods were safe from property crime (56%), but the highest proportion of residents who felt moderately safe (31%).
- ⇒ More British Columbia residents felt unsafe (15%), followed by Saskatchewan and Manitoba (at 14%).

The information for these fact sheets was excerpted from the report, *Gaining Ground: The Personal Security Index, 2001*. For more information about the methodology used to calculate the PSI, please consult the full report.