

# Rule of Law, Crime and Corruption

A good justice system is a prerequisite for any good democracy; one that instills confidence in the public that their rights will be protected and wrongdoers will be punished. As reported in an earlier section, Canadians are more confident in the justice system than they are in most other government institutions, and this level of trust is somewhat higher than in many countries in the western hemisphere. This section further explores the public's confidence in the justice system, as well as covering crime victimization and government corruption.

## Confidence in the justice system

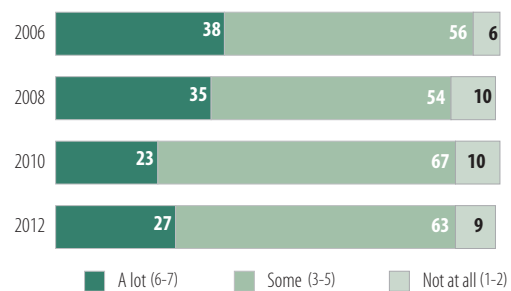
**TRUST IN JUDICIAL PROCESS.** A properly functioning judicial system is one that does many things, including guaranteeing a fair trial for those accused of committing a crime and then punishing those who have been found guilty. Public confidence in these two functions is therefore important in determining how well the system is operating.

**Guarantee a fair trial.** The right to a fair trial is a fundamental aspect of any nation that supports the rule of law. Under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, this is a right that is guaranteed in Canada. The extent to which citizens believe this is true, however, is important in assessing the stability of the Canadian justice system.

Overall, Canadians give a lukewarm endorsement to the justice system's ability to guarantee a fair trial. One in four (27%) believe clearly this is the case, compared with only nine percent who say it is not the case, but most (63%) are somewhere in the middle on this question. Confidence in the courts has increased slightly from 2010, but well below levels recorded in 2006 and 2008 (likely due to the effect of switching survey modes). The proportion that are definitively critical has remained consistently low over this time period.

The extent to which the courts are seen as guaranteeing a fair trial increases with income, education and age, and is also highest among Ontario residents and those on the political right. As might be expected, belief in the courts is highly correlated with the overall level of trust in the Canadian justice system.

To what extent do courts in Canada guarantee a fair trial?

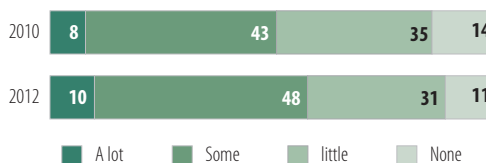


**Punishing the guilty.** If a fair trial renders a guilty verdict, citizens would expect the justice system to dole out an appropriate punishment for the wrongdoing. The survey asked Canadians if they were victims of robbery or assault, how much faith do they have that the judicial system would punish the guilty?

As with the guarantees for a fair trial, the public does not express overwhelming confidence in the justice system to mete out punishment to the guilty. Only one in ten (10%) say they have a lot of faith in this type of outcome, with a strong plurality (48%) indicating they would have “some” faith. These numbers reflect a modest improvement since 2010.

Faith in the judicial system punishing the guilty is highest in Ontario (especially in Toronto, where 19% have a lot of faith), among Canadians born outside of the country and those on the right of the political spectrum. Little to no confidence is most evident in eastern Canada, and among individuals with the lowest levels of education and income.

## Faith in punishing the guilty

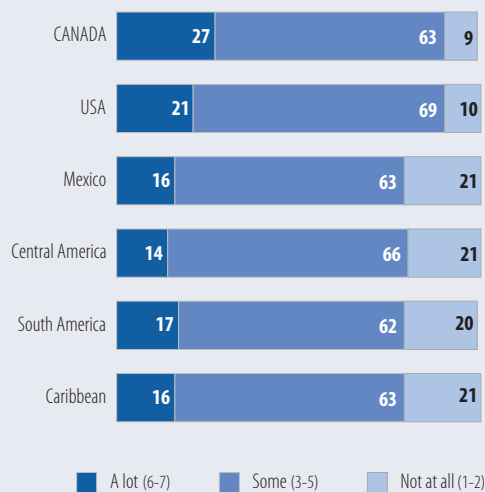


## International comparison

The extent of citizens’ faith in the guarantee of a fair trial is broadly similar across the hemisphere, but Canadians are among the most confident, second only to the Guyanese (30% have a lot of faith). Americans are somewhat less confident, and it is lower still in other regions. Faith in the system is more evident in Belize, Jamaica and Venezuela, and lowest in Honduras, Peru, Bolivia and Paraguay.

When it comes to punishing the guilty, Canadians are no more likely than most to express strong confidence in the system, but they are less apt to be clearly negative. Americans are more confident by comparison (16% have a lot of faith versus 8% who have none), but the strongest faith in punishing the guilty can be found in Nicaragua (31% a lot of faith), the Dominican Republic (25%) and El Salvador (24%). In contrast, little or no faith is the strong majority view in such countries as Paraguay (71%), Haiti (66%), Mexico (65%) and Bolivia (63%).

## Extent to which courts guarantee a fair trial



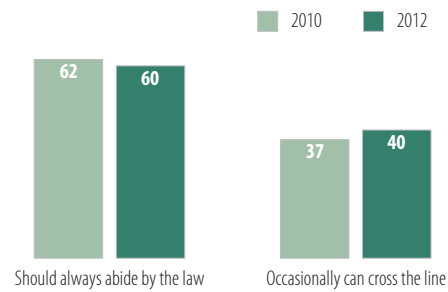
### SHOULD AUTHORITIES ABIDE BY THE LAW?

In order for the justice system to hold fair trials and punish wrongdoers, the authorities must first catch those who are accused of committing a crime. The means by which criminals are caught is therefore an interesting issue to bring up in describing the public's attitudes towards justice. Should the authorities always abide by the law in order to catch criminals?

While the majority of Canadians agree that authorities should always abide by the law in order to catch a criminal, there is by no means a consensus among Canadians on the matter. Six in ten (60%) believe that authorities should always abide by the law in order to catch criminals, but a sizeable minority (40%) believe that occasionally they may cross the line. Opinions have remained generally unchanged since 2010.

This balance in perspective is the norm across most of the country, with some variation. Priority on always abiding by the law is more widespread in Ontario (65%) and Manitoba/Saskatchewan (64%), lower income Canadians, immigrants and especially those on the political left (70%). Albertans stand out as being least apt to share this view (47%). There is little variation among different community sizes and levels of education.

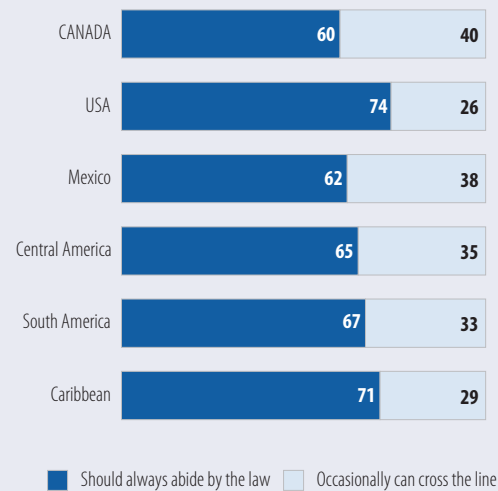
### To catch criminals, authorities ...



### International comparison

Across the hemisphere, the public is more likely to favour always abiding by the law to catch criminals, but the balance varies. Canadians are more likely than citizens from many countries to say it is acceptable to sometimes cross the line to catch criminals, and certainly more so than Americans (26%).

### To catch criminals, authorities ...



## Crime and community safety

A key factor influencing civic engagement, social capital and quality of life is the degree of safety and security people feel they have in the community in which they live. The survey explored this area in terms of personal experience with crime (as victims), perceptions of gang activity and general perceptions of safety within their neighbourhood.

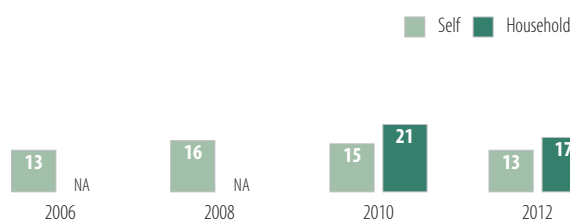
**PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH CRIME.** Data on crime in Canada is collected primarily in two ways: police-reported crime data and self-reported victimization surveys, which may take into account criminal behaviour that goes unreported to the police. The survey posed several self-reporting questions about citizens' experience with crime as victims.

One in seven (13%) Canadians report they were a victim of some form of crime within the past 12 months, with this proportion generally similar since 2006. A smaller percentage (7%) indicates someone else in their household was a crime victim over this period – and when accounting for overlap, this translates into one in six (17%) households experiencing crime of some type in the previous year, down marginally from 2010.

Rates of self-reported personal crime victimization vary by region, and are highest in the western provinces (notably Alberta at 18%) and lowest in Ontario (11%). Reported crime statistics consistently show perpetrators of crime to be predominantly young, and this also goes for victims: 19 percent of Canadians 18 to 29 report having been a victim in the past year, compared with only six percent among those 60-plus. More surprisingly, reported victimization does not vary by education or household income.

While the rate of reported crime victimization is lowest among residents of communities of less than 5,000 (8%), the country's largest urban centres (Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver) show rates of victimization at or below the national average, with the highest being in Vancouver (15%), followed by Toronto (12%) and Montreal (11%). Each of these urban centres showed a decline in self-reported crime victimization since 2008, with the largest drop in Vancouver, followed by Toronto.

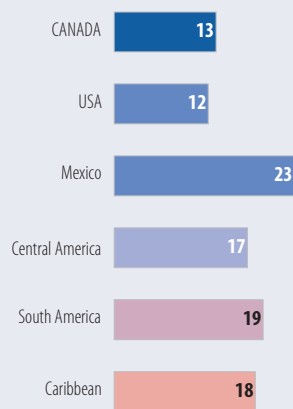
## Victimized by crime in last 12 months



### International comparison

Reported personal crime victimization in Canada is lower than in many countries in the hemisphere, although by no means the lowest. The Canadian rate is comparable to that in the USA, and below the average in other regions but there is considerable variation across countries. Self-reported victimization over the previous 12 months is lowest in Panama (7%), Guyana (8%) and Jamaica (8%), and highest in Ecuador (28%), Peru (28%), Bolivia (26%) and Mexico (23%).

### Self victimized by crime in last 12 months



Among Canadians reporting crime victimization in the past 12 months, two-thirds (67%) say this happened to them only once in this time period, with the remainder divided between those victimized twice (17%), and those with three or more such experiences (16%) over the past year. The average number of crimes experienced (among those experiencing any crimes in this time period) is 1.7 times, unchanged from 2010.<sup>10</sup>

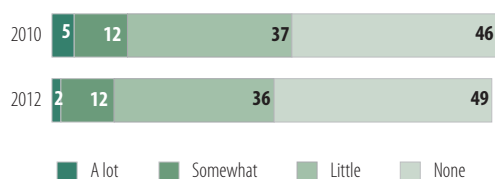
<sup>10</sup> This is based on a "trimmed" average (95%), which does not include a small handful of outlier responses that almost certainly reflect gross over-reporting.

**LOCAL GANG ACTIVITY.** The presence of gangs represents a major source of crime and has been an ongoing source of concern in many of Canada’s major cities. Close to one in six Canadians report their neighbourhood is affected a lot (2%) or somewhat (12%) by gangs, with one-third (36%) saying there is little gang activity, and half (49%) who say their neighbourhood is not affected at all by gangs. Perceptions of local gang problems are down marginally since 2010.

Across the country, perceptions of notable gang activity (“a lot” or “some”) is more prevalent in western Canada – especially in Manitoba/Saskatchewan (24%) and Vancouver (30%) – and least evident in Atlantic Canada (7%). Such perceptions are also higher in larger urban centres, although less so in Montreal (12%). Since 2010, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta are the only areas of the country where perceptions of neighbourhood gang activity did not decrease.

Reporting of gang activity is also highest among Canadians aged 18 to 29, those with less than high school education, lower household income and those born outside of Canada. Among those in neighbourhoods with at least some gang activity, nearly half (47%) say someone in their household was a crime victim in the past year.

Neighbourhood affected by gangs



**SAFETY OF NEIGHBOURHOOD.** How safe do Canadians feel in their communities, in terms of the likelihood of being assaulted or robbed? Most Canadians believe their neighbourhoods are safe, but the strength of this view has been on the decline.

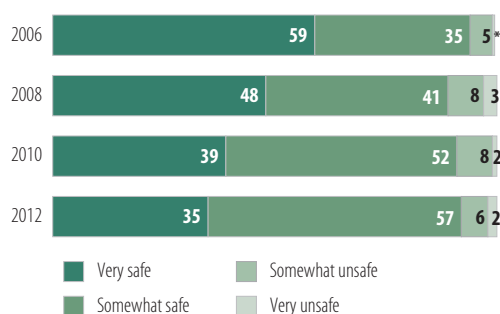
One-third (35%) of Canadians say they feel very safe in their neighbourhood, with a majority (57%) indicating that they feel somewhat safe, and one in ten feeling somewhat (6%) or very (2%) unsafe. The proportion reporting to feel at least somewhat safe has held notably steady since 2006, but the number who feel very safe has been declining steadily, indicating an overall drop in perceived local safety over this time period.<sup>11</sup>

Perceptions of one’s neighbourhood as very safe are most widespread in Atlantic Canada (46%) and least so among Quebecers (25%; and only 16% among Montrealers). Despite Toronto’s reputation for big-city crime and violence, residents’ perceptions of local safety match the national average (35%) and is somewhat higher than in Vancouver (27%).

Predictably, women (32%) are somewhat less likely than men (37%) to feel very safe in their neighbourhood, and this has been the case since 2006. Yet, this gender difference is relatively modest, and only exists in communities of 100,000 and over.

This decline in perceptions of neighbourhood safety mirrors the one on neighbourhood trust (see page 14), and may be influenced by the same factors (e.g., increased diversity within the population, growing income inequality). This trend calls for further corroboration. The Environics Institute’s Focus Canada research shows Canadians’ perceptions of safety walking alone at night in their neighborhood has held remarkably stable over the past 35 years, and that the public is less likely than at any time since 1994 to believe crime rates are increasing.

## Safety of neighbourhood where you live

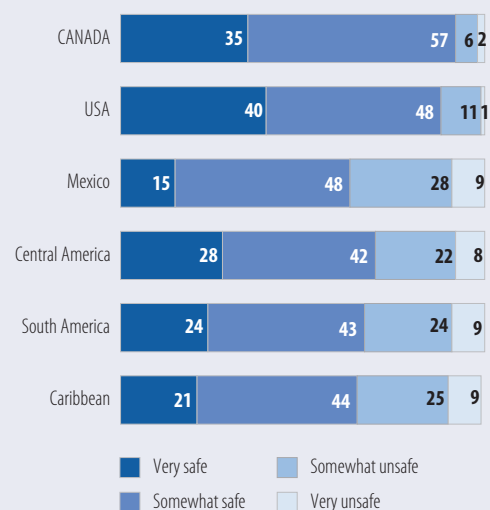


### International comparison

Canadians report the lowest level of local gang activity in the hemisphere, with similar results from the USA. A lot of gang activity is indicated by an appreciable proportion in the Dominican Republic (24%), Brazil (18%), El Salvador (16%), Colombia (17%), Peru (15%) and Mexico (12%).

Similarly, Canadians are among the most secure in terms of personal safety in their neighbourhoods, along with Americans and countries such as Paraguay, Nicaragua and Jamaica. It is a different story in many other countries in the hemisphere, with neighbourhoods considered unsafe by significant proportions in such countries as Peru (50%), Venezuela (43%), El Salvador (42%) and Bolivia (40%).

## Safety of neighbourhood where you live



<sup>11</sup>The notable decline in “very safe” neighbourhood ratings between 2008 and 2010 may be due in part to survey mode effects noted earlier in this report.

## Corruption in government

Bribery and corruption in government can undermine public confidence in the democratic system and institutions. While not as big a concern in Canada as in some other countries, corruption at various levels of government is apparent, and often makes for big headlines. In the past decade, the federal sponsorship scandal dominated federal politics for a period of time, and was instrumental in the downfall of the Liberal Party of Canada.

**BRIBERY AMONG PUBLIC SERVANTS.** In some countries, petty bribery is a common practice of exchange for obtaining needed public services or avoiding public sanctions, such as traffic tickets. Such activity happens in Canada as well, but appears to be infrequent. Only three percent of Canadians report having been *asked for a bribe by a police officer* in the past 12 months, and comparable to the proportion reported in 2010 (1%). Incidence of being asked for a bribe by a police officer is marginally higher in Alberta (6%) and among those aged 18 to 29 (5%).

Similarly, only two percent of Canadians report having been *asked for a bribe by a government employee* in the last 12 months, consistent with findings from 2006 (1%) and 2010 (2%). The prevalence of such experiences is similar across the population, but is a bit higher in British Columbia (5%).

### International comparison

Canadians and Americans report the lowest levels of requests for bribes from police officers and government employees. Such experiences are noticeably higher in other countries, notably Mexico (20%), Bolivia (19%) and Guatemala (18%) in the case of police officers, and Haiti in the case of government employees (17%).

### Asked for a bribe in last 12 months



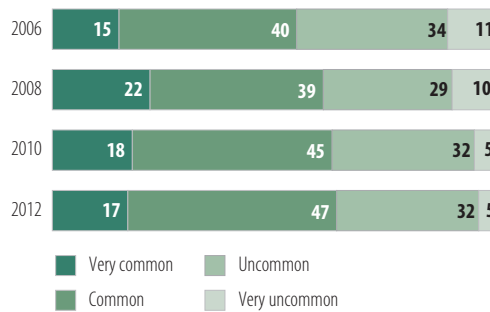
**CORRUPTION AMONG PUBLIC OFFICIALS.** Apart from direct experience, what is the public's perception about the prevalence of government corruption in Canada today? While very few may be confronted with public servants asking for bribes, most believe corruption is a common part of the country's governance.

Based on their own experience or what they hear, almost two-thirds of Canadians believe that corruption among public officials is very common (17%) or common (47%), compared with one-third (32%) who say it is uncommon, and only five percent who maintain it is very uncommon. These results are largely unchanged at the national level since 2006, except for a modest decline in the proportion who believe corruption among public officials in Canada is very uncommon.

Public views about the breadth of government corruption vary across the country. Quebec stands out as the province where such corruption is most widely seen as very common (32%) and where it has increased noticeably since 2008 (influenced in part by the current media stories about irregularities surrounding construction industry contracts that pressured the provincial government to set up an independent inquiry. Elsewhere in Canada, the public is much less apt to believe government corruption is very common (the lowest being Alberta at 6%), and this view has diminished in these regions of the country since 2008.

The view that government corruption is very common is also more prevalent in smaller communities (less than 5,000 residents) (27%) and among those with lower socio-economic status (household income and education). Canadians who place themselves on the left of the political spectrum (69%) are also slightly more likely to say corruption is common than those on the right (57%), as was also the case in 2010.

## Corruption among public officials



### International comparison

Canadians are less likely than citizens of any other country to say corruption is very common among public officials, with the notable exception of Suriname (6%). The view that such corruption is very common is held by at least four in ten citizens in many countries, including Columbia (60%), the Dominican Republic (59%), Peru (53%), Argentina (51%), Honduras (52%), Panama (50%) and Mexico (45%).

Perception of government corruption across the hemisphere have decreased marginally since 2006, with the most significant declines in Nicaragua, Ecuador, Chile and Brazil, while increasing most noticeably in Colombia.

### Corruption among political officials

