

Crime and Justice

Crime trends

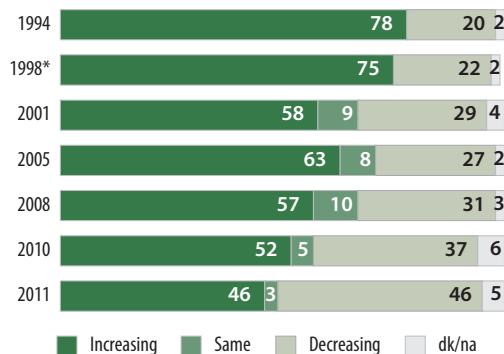
ARE CRIME RATES INCREASING OR NOT? Government and police statistics reveal a steady decline in crime rates over the past two decades, and Canadians' perceptions about increasing crime rates are also declining and are now now the lowest on record (since Focus Canada tracking began in 1994).

Fewer than half (46%) now say that crime rates are on the rise (down 6 points since 2010), while an equal proportion believe crime is declining and that the media is over-dramatizing crime stories (46%, up 9). Three percent volunteer that crime rates are holding steady, while another five percent are unable to offer an opinion on this question.

This trend of declining perceptions about rising crime rates is evident across most the country, but most noticeably in Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Concerns about rising crime rates continue to be more widespread among residents of Manitoba (possibly due to concerns about gang violence in Winnipeg) and, to a lesser extent, in Atlantic Canada. Crime rates are more likely to be seen as rising among residents of rural communities than those living in cities, and this gap has widened over the past year. Perceptions of rising crime continue to be most evident among Canadians with lower socio-economic status and Conservative supporters.

Crime rates – real increase or media hype?

1994 - 2011



* Slightly different question wording: "staying the same" was not an option

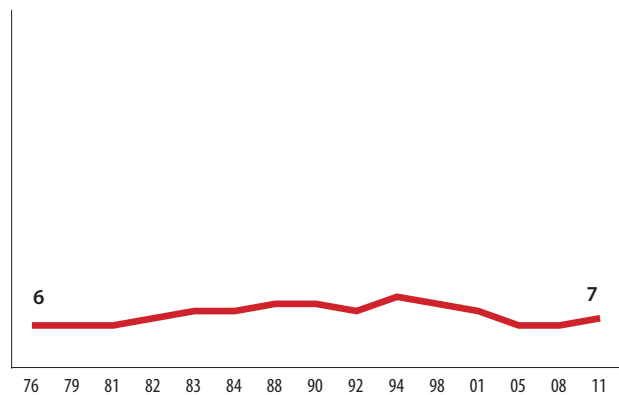
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH CRIME. Perceptions of crime rates are one thing, but what about personal experience? Seven percent (7%) of Canadians report having been a victim of a criminal act in the previous six months, consistent with Focus Canada data collected as far back as 1976 (with the rate varying by only a couple of percentage points, and peaking at 10% in 1994).

As before, reports of crime victimization are marginally higher in Saskatchewan (13%), Manitoba (12%) and B.C. (9%), and among Canadians 18 to 29 years of age (11%).

Among those reporting such experience, seven in ten (72%) say they reported this crime to police. This reflects an increase from 2008 (66%), but remains below the level recorded in 2001 and 2005 (77%).

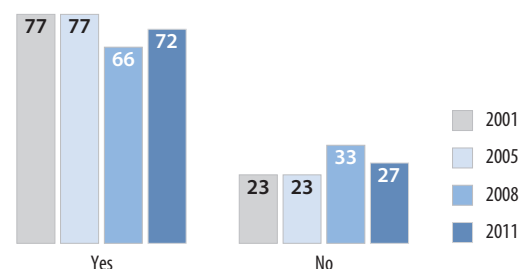
Been victim of a crime in past six months

1976 - 2011



Reported the crime

Among those who have been victim of crime in past six months
2001 - 2011



Crime prevention and control

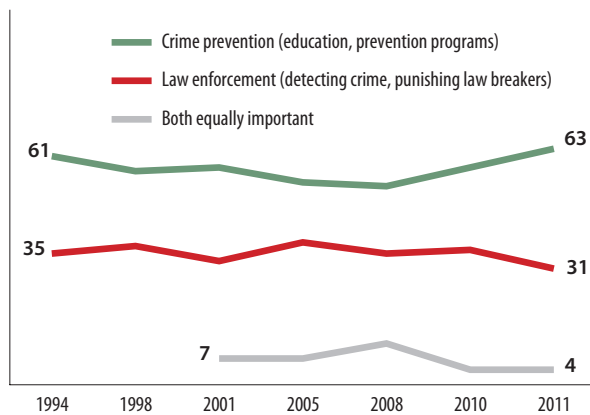
CRIME PREVENTION VERSUS LAW ENFORCEMENT.

In terms of how governments are expected to fight crime, Canadians have long expressed the view that prevention is a better approach than enforcement. This sentiment has strengthened over the past year, continuing a trend dating back to 2008.

When asked which of two approaches should be given greater emphasis by governments, more than six in ten (63%, up 5 points from 2010) identify crime prevention (e.g., education, crime prevention programs), compared with half as many (31%, down 5) who place a higher priority on law enforcement (detecting crime, punishing lawbreakers). These latest results reflect the largest gap between these two perspectives since Focus Canada began tracking this question in 1994.

This growing emphasis on crime prevention is evident across the population, with the shift since 2010 most noticeable in Atlantic Canada, the Prairies and in smaller-sized communities. Conservative Party supporters remain less likely than others to support an emphasis on prevention over enforcement, but are also more likely to do so than a year ago (51%, up 9 points).

Government emphasis on crime and justice 1994 - 2011

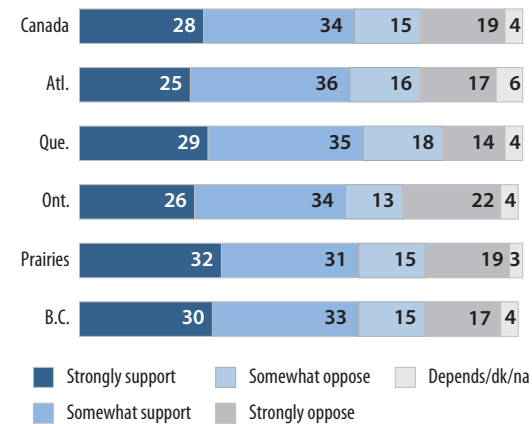


NEW OMNIBUS CRIME LEGISLATION. Declining public concerns about crime notwithstanding, Canadians are broadly supportive of the federal government's new omnibus crime bill, which (among other things) will increase the length of jail time for some offences and reduce judges' discretion on sentencing. Six in ten say they strongly (28%) or somewhat (34%) support this legislation, compared with one-third who somewhat (15%) or strongly (19%) oppose it.

The legislation attracts majority support across the country, but most widely in Alberta, in communities with fewer than 100,000 inhabitants, allophones and Conservative Party supporters (but also attracting small majorities of Liberal, NDP and Bloc supporters). Support for the new bill is comparatively weaker in Saskatchewan, among university graduates, Canadians aged 60 plus and those with no religious affiliation.

Support for new federal gov't omnibus crime legislation

By region 2011



Several provinces have warned that this new legislation will require them to spend additional millions on law enforcement and new prisons, but this message is having a limited effect on those who support the bill. Among supporters, six in ten (62%) say they are just as likely to support the new crime laws despite the increased provincial spending it may require, compared with only one-third (35%) who say this would make them less likely to support it.

Such support in the face of increased provincial costs reflects the majority view across the country, although it is comparatively weaker in Ontario and Quebec, as well as among allophones, Canadians aged 18 to 29, and those with the lowest levels of education and income (groups most vulnerable to changing economic conditions).