

Canadians' perceptions of personal safety and crime, 2014

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A sense of one's personal safety is linked to overall feelings of well-being. Alternatively, a perceived lack of safety can have numerous adverse effects on individuals and communities, such as reduced social cohesion and increased spending on crime protection, as well as having negative effects on both physical and mental health. According to the 2014 General Social Survey on Canadians' safety (victimization), the majority of Canadians said they were satisfied (50%) or very satisfied (38%) with their personal safety from crime. Data on perceptions of safety are being released today in the *Juristat* article "[Canadians' perceptions of personal safety and crime, 2014](#)."

Most Canadians believe that crime in their neighbourhood has not changed

Canadians' perceptions of crime in their neighbourhood do not always reflect the police-reported crime trends. In 2014, the majority (74%) of Canadians said they felt the level of crime in their neighbourhood was about the same as five years earlier, while police-reported statistics show that crime has been on a steady decline since the early 1990s. In contrast, fewer than 1 in 10 Canadians believed that crime has actually been declining.

Of note, fewer Canadians believe that crime has been increasing in their neighbourhood when compared with what was reported in 1993. That year, almost half (46%) of Canadians believed that crime in their neighbourhood had been increasing over the previous five years.

See chart "[Canadians' perception of changes in the level of crime in their neighbourhood over the previous five years, 1993 to 2014](#)."

Residents of the Atlantic provinces and Ontario are the most satisfied with their personal safety from crime

While most Canadians across the country reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their personal safety, there were some slight regional variations. In general, these trends mirrored the regional differences in police-reported crime rates.

The highest levels of satisfaction with personal safety were in provinces with Crime Severity Indexes (CSI) below the national average in 2014: New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island and Ontario.

There was also variation between cities when it came to satisfaction with personal safety. Generally, the larger the city, the lower the satisfaction among its residents. For example, residents of Canada's largest cities—Toronto (36%), Montréal (31%) and Vancouver (31%)—were much less likely to report being very satisfied with their personal safety than people living in small towns or rural areas (45%). Of note, both Toronto (44.7) and Montréal (60.2) had police-reported CSIs that were significantly lower than the national average (66.7) in 2014.

Several studies show that feelings of safety are only partially influenced by crime levels. Other factors—including some more common in urban areas—such as signs of social or physical disorder and frequent interactions with strangers can also reduce one's sense of safety. In addition, within each city, a sense of safety can vary from one neighbourhood to another.

Women are much less likely than men to feel very safe when walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark

In 2014, women (38%) were much less likely than men (64%) to report feeling very safe when walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark. Young women aged 15 to 24 were even less likely (28%) to report feeling very safe in the same situation. However, women did feel safer in 2014 than they did in 1999. The proportion of women reporting feeling very safe increased from 24% to 38% over this period.



See chart ["Canadians sense of safety when walking alone in one's neighbourhood after dark, by sex, 1999 and 2014."](#)

Women were more likely than men to say that they regularly take steps to protect themselves from crime, such as checking the back seat of the car for intruders (47%, versus 23% of men), changing their routine or avoiding certain places (31% versus 23%), carrying something to protect themselves or alert others (16% versus 8%), or staying home at night out of fear of going out alone (10% versus 2%).

A number of studies suggest that fear of crime among women is mostly related to the fear of being sexually assaulted. Just under one-quarter (24%) of women who reported being sexually assaulted in the 12 months preceding the survey said they felt very safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark. Breaking and entering had the biggest impact on women's feeling of safety, with fewer than one in five women (19%) who were victims of this crime reporting feeling very safe when walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark. Among men, the crime with the biggest impact on their sense of safety was robbery.

Visible minorities feel less safe

Persons who self-identify as belonging to a visible minority were less likely than those who do not self-identify in this way to say that they felt very safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark (44% versus 54%). Of note, the majority of Canadians identifying themselves as a visible minority live in large cities, where feelings of safety are relatively low. Yet even after taking into account where they lived, visible minorities remained less likely to report feeling safe than their non-visible minorities counterparts.

Among visible minority groups, Arabs (15%) and West Asians (16%) were most likely to say they felt unsafe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark. Among West Asian or Arab women, 25% reported feeling unsafe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark. This marks a change when compared with perceptions of personal safety 10 years earlier, when the sense of safety felt by Arabs and West Asians was comparable to that of other visible minorities.

People who trust their local police and their neighbours feel safer

Canadians' relationships with their neighbours and their trust in the police are two factors that can affect their sense of safety. For example, people who believed that their neighbours were trustworthy were twice as likely to report feeling very safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark, than were people who did not trust their neighbours (60% versus 31%). Similarly, people who believed that their neighbours would call the police if they witnessed a crime felt safer than those who believed the opposite.

Trust in the police has a similar impact on a person's sense of safety: 59% of Canadians with a great deal of confidence in the police felt very safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark, compared with less than half (49%) of people with less confidence in the police.

Note to readers

The data on perceptions of safety and victimization were collected in the General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization. The purpose of this survey is to provide data on Canadians' perceptions of personal safety, crime and the justice system, and on their personal experiences with eight types of crime: sexual assault, robbery, assault, theft of personal property, breaking and entering, theft of motor vehicles and parts, theft of household property and vandalism. The GSS is a household survey conducted every five years; the most recent cycle was held in 2014. The survey target population consisted of people aged 15 and older and excluded people living full-time in institutions.

The GSS includes several measures of sense of safety, the main ones being drawn from the following questions:

1. In general, how satisfied are you with your personal safety from crime?
2. Compared with other areas in Canada, do you think your neighbourhood has a higher amount of crime, about the same, or a lower amount of crime?
3. During the last five years, do you think that crime in your neighbourhood has increased, decreased, or remained about the same?
4. While waiting for or using public transportation alone after dark, do you feel very worried, somewhat worried, or not at all worried about your safety from crime?
5. When alone in your home in the evening or at night, do you feel very worried, somewhat worried, or not at all worried about your safety from crime?
6. How safe do you feel from crime walking alone in your area after dark?

See table: "[Sense of safety when walking alone in one's neighbourhood after dark, overall satisfaction with personal safety from crime and confidence in the police, by province, census metropolitan area or census agglomeration, 2014.](#)"

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [4504](#).

The *Juristat* article "[Canadians' perceptions of personal safety and crime, 2014](#)" ([85-002-X](#)) is now available.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).