

## **Public Sees a Drop in Crime, But Broad Concern Remains**

The public has grown less pessimistic about the severity of the nation's crime problem, mirroring a decline in actual crime rates in recent years. Still, broad concern remains.

Just more than a third of Americans think the crime problem in this country is "very bad," down from nearly half in 1996. The FBI last month reported that crime has fallen in each of the last eight years, the longest stretch of declining crime rates on record.

Things are even better closer to home. Just five percent say crime is very bad in their own community. That's about the same as in recent years.

	Crime problem is "very bad"
In the U.S.	
6/4/00	36%
6/8/97	42
5/6/96	48
Own community	
6/4/00	5
6/8/97	7
5/6/96	7

**PRIORITIES** - Though both crime rates and the perceived severity of the problem are on the wane, crime remains a top public priority. It ranked third out of 15 issues tested in a recent ABC News/Washington Post poll, with 72 percent calling it "very important" in their vote for president.

One reason: There's still a broad sense that crime is a national problem, even though the intensity of that view has eased. In addition to the 36 percent who call the crime problem "very bad," another 44 percent call it "bad," for a total of 80 percent. That's down from 90 percent in 1996, but still very high. (Twenty-three percent, by contrast, say crime is either "bad" or "very bad" in their local community.)

The view that America has a continued crime problem is not unwarranted. Though there have been improvements, the rate of violent crime in the United States is still much higher than in many other countries. For example, the Justice Department reports that the murder rate is about six times higher here than in Great Britain.

**DISCONNECT** - The difference between perceptions of crime locally and nationally are logical as well: Most people don't have much direct experience with crime where they live, but they are exposed to reports of crimes elsewhere via the news media.

Indeed, among those who perceive a crime problem nationally, 82 percent say their assessment is based on crime reports they've seen in the news. Only 17 percent say it's based on their personal experiences.

GROUPS – Perceptions vary by demographic group; crime is seen as more severe by women and the elderly (who may feel more vulnerable) and those with lower incomes (who may live in less secure areas).

	Crime problem is "very bad"
Men	30%
Women	43
Age:	
18-34	26
65+	45
Income:	
<\$25K	42
\$75K+	25

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News.com survey was conducted by telephone May 31-June 4, 2000, among a random national sample of 1,013 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Fieldwork by ICR- International Communications Research of Media, Pa.

Analysis by Daniel Merkle.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:

<http://www.abcnews.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

55. How would you rate the crime problem in this country - would you say it's very bad, bad, not too bad or not bad at all?

	-----Bad-----			-----Not bad-----			No
	NET	Very	Bad	NET	Not too	Not at all	opinion
6/4/00	80	36	44	19	18	1	1
6/8/97	87	42	44	13	12	1	1
5/6/96	90	48	42	10	9	1	0

56. How would you rate the crime problem in your own community where you live - would you say it's very bad, bad, not too bad or not bad at all?

	-----Bad-----			-----Not bad-----			No
	NET	Very	Bad	NET	Not too	Not at all	opinion
6/4/00	23	5	18	76	52	25	1
6/8/97	26	7	18	74	49	25	*
5/6/96	31	7	24	68	47	21	*

57. (Of those who said crime in this country is bad) When you say the crime problem in this country is bad, is that based on what you've seen or read in the news, or is it based on your own personal experience?

	Seen/read	Personal	No opinion
6/4/00	82	17	2
6/8/97	83	16	1
5/6/96	76	22	2

\*\*\*END\*\*\*