



## Perception of Crime in Canada by Reginald W. Bibby

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### Concern About Crime Lowest in Three Decades *Similar Concern Declines for Violence and Juvenile Offences*

Serious crimes continue to make headlines across the country. Nevertheless, the percentage of Canadians who think crime is an extremely serious problem has actually dropped significantly over the past thirty years. What's more, far fewer Canadians today see violence and juvenile offences as severe problems than was the case in the mid-1970s.

Such are the findings reported by sociologist and author Reginald Bibby of the University of Lethbridge. He has been monitoring social trends in Canada through unique national surveys carried out every five years since 1975.

- Bibby's surveys show that in 1975, 57% of Canadians felt that **crime** was a "very serious" problem. Today that figure has dropped to just 33%. In the mid-70s, 5 in 10 people maintained that **violence** was a severe problem, compared to a current level of 3 in 10. **Juvenile crime** was viewed as a "very serious" problem by 42% back then, versus just 26% now.
- Such readings of how Canadians have been viewing crime and violence are consistent with a recent **Statistics Canada report** showing that "Canada's overall national crime rate, based on incidents reported to police, hit its lowest point in over 25 years in 2006." The decline, said the agency, was "driven by a decline in non-violent crime."<sup>1</sup>
- The perception that crime constitutes a "very serious" problem **varies little by region** of the country. However, it is somewhat **higher among older people** and lowest among younger, Post-Boomers under the age of 40. It also is higher among **women** than men. An extremely **surprising finding** is that, consistent with Statistics Canada data on actual crime,<sup>2</sup> concern about the seriousness of crime is **inversely related to community size**: it tends to increase as the size of communities decrease.

Bibby is quick to point out that such findings about crime and the perception of its seriousness in no way negate, minimize, or trivialize the **reality of ongoing criminal offences**, some of which, of course, are horrific in nature. However, the findings do suggest that, contrary to widespread belief, growing numbers of people since the 1960s have felt that **the quality of interpersonal life in Canada has been getting better, not worse**. As he argues in his most recent book, *The Boomer Factor* (2006), **the idea that we are becoming a less civil society is largely a myth**.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Daily," Statistics Canada, July 18, 2007.

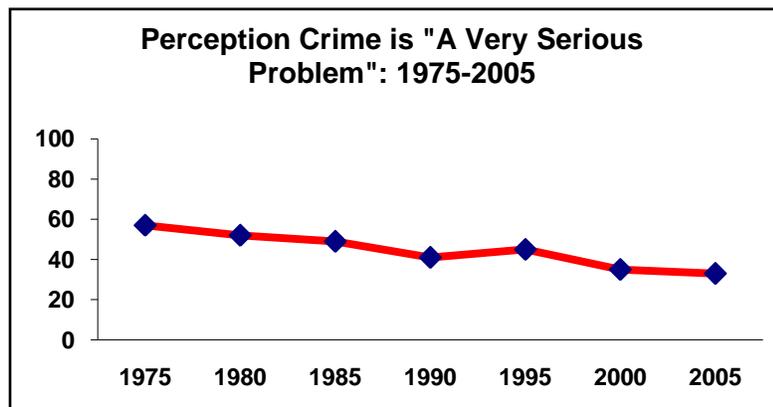
<sup>2</sup> "The Daily," Statistics Canada, June 28, 2007.

**Illustrative graphics:**

Source: Reginald W. Bibby, *Project Canada Survey Series*, [reginaldbibby.com](http://reginaldbibby.com).

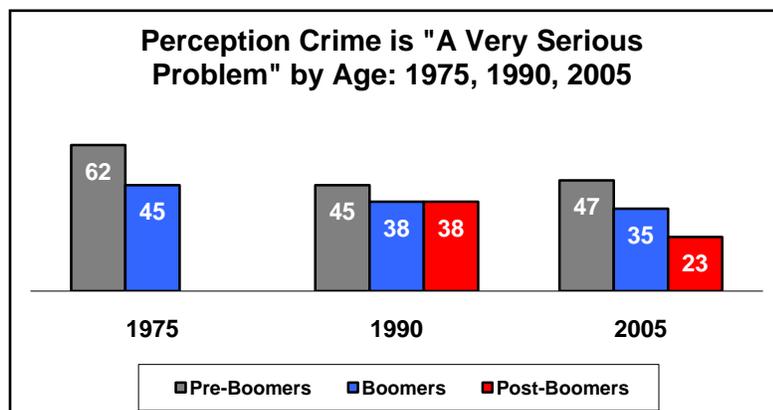
**Perception of the Seriousness of Crime**  
 Crime, Juvenile Delinquency, and Violence Are  
 "Very Serious Problems in Canada today"

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005
Crime	57%	52	49	41	45	35	33
Violence generally	50	48	---	40	35	29	31
Juvenile delinquency	42	40	39	28	39	34	26



**Perception Crime is "A Very Serious Problem" by Region and Gender: 2005**

REGION	
British Columbia	30%
Alberta	36
Sask-Manitoba	38
Ontario	32
Quebec	34
Atlantic	35
GENDER	
Women	38
Men	29
COMMUNITY SIZE	
Over 400,000	26
100,000-400,000	30
30,000-99,000	34
City-town <30,000	42
Rural non-farm	41
Farm	46



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Reginald Bibby holds the Board of Governors Research Chair in Sociology at the University of Lethbridge. He has been monitoring Canadian social trends since the mid-1970s, making his findings available through a large number of media and personal appearances and ten best-selling books. His most recent book, *The Boomer Factor: What Canada's Most Famous Generation is Leaving Behind*, was released in October of 2006 and gives major attention to civility trends. Details on Bibby and his work can be found at [www.reginaldbibby.com](http://www.reginaldbibby.com).