

What Accounts for the High Rates of Crime?

	1981	1982	1986	1989	1990	1994
Unemployment, social distress	37%	58%	26%	12%	8%	8%
Failure of the criminal justice system	33	20	14	11	6	20
Crisis of personal values	19	15	14	12	6	30
Drugs	13	18	25	51	60	20
Media and violence	3	5	3	3	1	NA

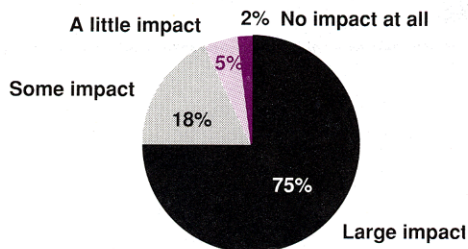
Question: The somewhat differing responses in each year have been collapsed into the above broad categories. The precise questions asked here are: (1981) What is the most responsible for the increasing rate of crime? Unemployment, Courts too lenient, Breakdown of family, society, values, Punishment not severe enough, Drugs, TV violence, movies; (1982, 1986, 1989) What would you say is most responsible for this country's high crime rate? Unemployment, poverty and the like, Courts too lenient, Not enough police/police not effective, Breakdown of family, society, moral values, Punishments not severe enough, Drugs, Violence on TV entertainment shows and in movies, Lack of opportunity/education; (1990) In your opinion, what factors are most responsible for crime in the US today? Drugs, Unemployment, Breakdown of family social values, Courts too lenient, Punishment too lax, TV violence, Lack of education, Guns, Poverty; (1994) Thinking about the cause of crime in the country, which of the following do you feel is the one factor most responsible for the recent problems with crime in the country—Unemployment, Drugs, Availability of handguns, Breakdown of the family, or Lenient sentencing?

Note: Numbers may add to more than 100% due to multiple responses.

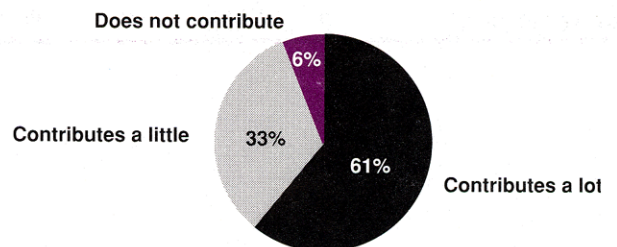
Source: Surveys by the Gallup Organization, January 16-23, 1981 and September 10-11, 1990; by ABC News, December 7-18, 1982, August 14-26, 1986, and September 7-9, 1989; and by NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, January 15-18, 1994.

The Media's Responsibility is Ranked Low on the List of Causes of Crime— But the Public Still Sees the Media Implicated in a Culture of Violence

Question: ...[P]lease tell me to what extent you believe entertainment programs on TV contribute to...violence. Do they have a large impact, some impact, a little impact or no impact at all?



Question: Do you think that television contributes a lot, contributes a little, or doesn't contribute at all to this violence?



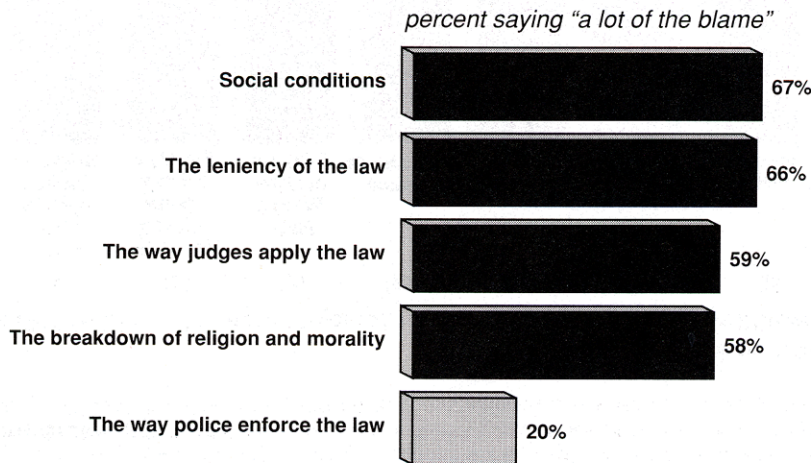
Source: Survey by *US News & World Report*, March 16-18, 1996.

Source: Survey by Louis Harris and Associates, February 2-6, 1994.

Two Decades Ago, Americans Were Much More Inclined to Blame “Social Conditions”—Poverty, Unemployment, Limited Education—As the Source for the High Rates of Crime Than They Are Today

1977

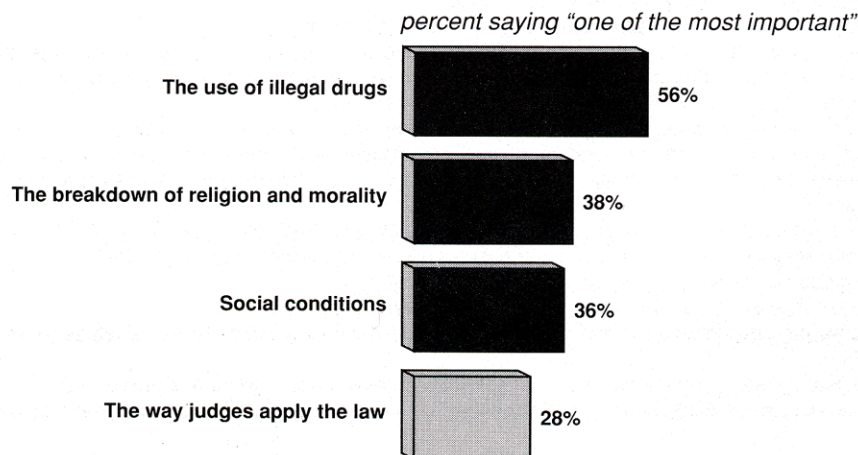
Question: ...Would you place a lot of the blame or not much of the blame for the high crime rate on...?



Source: Survey by CBS News/*New York Times*, July 19-25, 1977.

1996

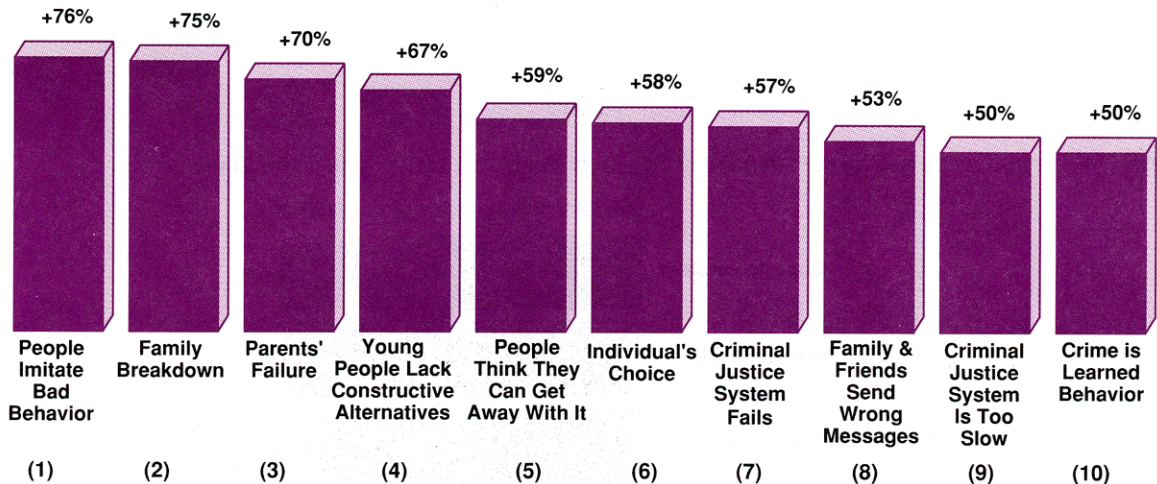
Question: How would you rate...? Would you say it is one of the most important causes of crime, it is important but so are other causes, or it is not an important cause of crime?



Source: Survey by CBS News/*New York Times*, May 31-June 3, 1996.

Causes of Crimes

The graph below shows items posed in the Sam Houston State University survey in which the percentage of respondents citing each item as a cause of crime exceeds the percentage disagreeing it is a cause by the greatest margin. Each bar is the percent *agreeing* the item is a cause of crime minus the percentage disagreeing.



Question: [F]or each of the following [causes of crime in this country, please tell me] whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree.

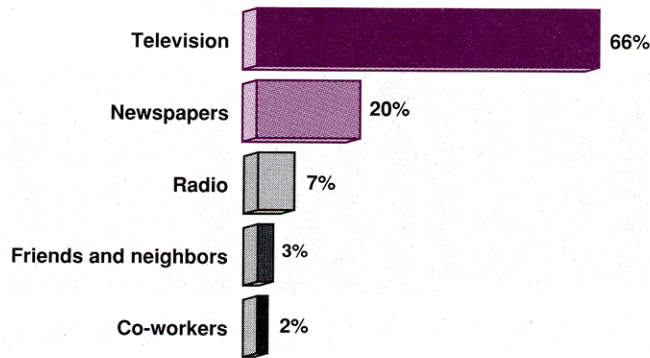
- A reason we have so much crime these days is because some people turn to crime as a way of achieving the American Dream (+21%).
- (2) Crime occurs in our society when there is a breakdown in families and schools which keeps people from feeling a sense of community.**
- People commit crime because they live in bad neighborhoods that are run down and disorganized (-1%).
- Many people who commit crimes are acting out according to the label "criminal" that has been imposed on them by their family and friends (-9%).
- (6) Crime is the product of a person's free will.**
- (7) Crime in this country occurs because the criminal justice system does not make the punishment fit the crime.**
- Crime occurs in this country because the American economic system has produced a society where some people have a lot and others have nothing (+1%).
- People commit crime just because it is part of a culture which has a value system that is different from the rest of society (-1%).
- Crime is caused by members of a criminal subculture that supports and encourages criminal activity (+23%).
- (1) Some people learn criminal behavior from imitating family, friends, and others they see doing wrong.**
- Crime occurs in our society because it provides the only opportunity for some people to succeed (-18%).
- (5) The main reason why people break the law is that they figure they can get away with it.**
- (10) Crime is like any other behavior: It's learned from the people around you.**
- (3) Kids are likely to break the law when they do not feel close to their parents and do not care what their parents think of them.**
- A major reason why we have so much crime these days is because America still has too much poverty, racism, and social injustice (+29%).
- People are bound to turn to crime when they are taught to want success, money, and fancy cars, but then can't get them (+13%).
- Many people commit crimes because they were born that way (-76%).
- Today's criminals were yesterday's abused children who have been emotionally damaged (+27%).
- (8) People commit crimes when family, friends, or others either approve of the crime, or do not discourage their criminal behavior**
- (9) People break the law because our criminal justice system does not punish criminals quickly enough.**
- People commit crimes because they are not intelligent enough to do otherwise (-60%).
- Many people who commit crimes do so because they can't control their anger and other impulses (+39%).
- Young people commit crimes if all they do is hang around on the corner because there are no youth groups or summer jobs (+27%).
- The reason the United States has such a high crime rate is that too many of its people are exploited by a system that makes sure that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer (-2%).
- Kids often become criminals because they live in neighborhoods where it's okay to break the law (+32%).
- Putting offenders in prison may make them even more criminal because prisons are schools of crime (+26%).
- People who commit crimes do so because they have emotional problems (+13%).
- People commit crimes because their ties to family, school or friends are weak or broken (+47%).
- (4) Crime is committed by young people who are not involved enough in wholesome activities such as spending time with parents or working on school projects.**
- What the criminal justice system does to young people who break the law makes them even more criminal (+6%).
- One reason why so many offenders go back into crime is that when they are released from prison, they can't get a job because they have a criminal record (+36%).

Note: Question text in bold corresponds to the above bars. Other questions, not shown in above bars, are listed with corresponding percentages.

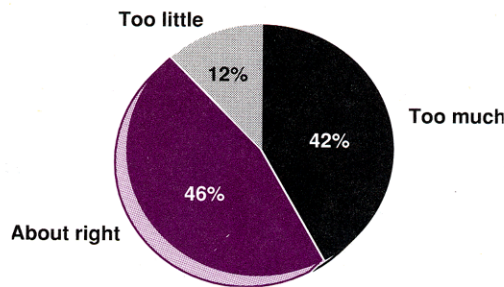
Source: Survey by the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University and the College of Criminal Justice, Sam Houston State University, May 16-June 10, 1996.

We Get Our Picture of Crime from TV and Worry About the Amount of Coverage

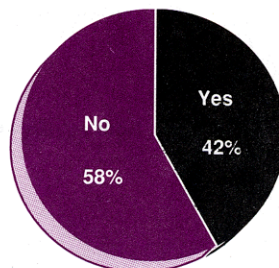
Question: Do you get most of your news about crime from television, newspapers, radio, co-workers or friends and neighbors?



Question: ...Concerning media coverage of crime, how much attention does the local media in your community give to violent crime...?



Question: Are you a regular viewer of television programs that deal with crime or criminal justice issues, such as COPS, Real Stories of the Highway Patrol, Justice Files or America's Most Wanted?



Note: In most instances, "don't know" responses of less than 7% are calculated out of pie charts throughout the magazine.

Source: Survey by the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University and the College of Criminal Justice, Sam Houston State University, June 6-26, 1995.