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Crime

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HARRIS PUBLIC OPINION ANALYSIS

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*File Issues*  
Not Before

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BY LOUIS HARRIS

A substantial 70 per cent of the American people feel that crime in their own home area has been increasing in the past year. This is the highest number who have reported crime on the rise since the Harris Survey first took such soundings in 1967. The rate of crime is felt to be rising most in the South and in the small towns of the country, much more than on the East or West coasts or in big cities.

When asked about major types of crimes, the public believes that robberies and house break-ins are increasing most, mentioned by 82 per cent, followed by frauds, bad check-passing, and shop-lifting, estimated by 70 per cent to be increasing. Assaults, muggings, and physical attacks follow, believed by 65 per cent to be going up. A majority of 51 per cent feel that rapes are increasing, while an even 50 per cent of the public holds the view that murders are on the rise.

With the rise in public worry about crimes of nearly all descriptions, a lopsided 67-20 per cent majority feels that "our system of law enforcement does not discourage people from committing crimes." This division of opinion has scarcely changed over the past five years.

When asked to rate the job done by law enforcement officials at the local, state, and national levels, relatively narrow majorities express their approval of local and state efforts, but federal authorities obtain no better than a 44-44 per cent stand-off, slightly better than their standing back in 1973. It is apparent that public confidence in law enforcement has been shaken in recent years and has not been restored.

(MORE)

Given their feeling that crime is once again on the increase and with confidence in law enforcement not gaining, it is not surprising that 55 per cent of all adults in the country say they feel "more uneasy personally on the streets than a year ago." up from the level of last year.

The implications of these results clearly are that public concern over safety on the streets and the threat of crime are on the rise. While most people are convinced that the question of curbing crime is mainly a local problem, nonetheless in its current scope, it clearly is of national magnitude.

Recently, the Harris Survey asked a cross section of 1,543 families nationwide:

"In the past year, do you feel the crime rate in your area has been increasing, decreasing, or has it remained the same as it was before?"

ESTIMATE CRIME RATE IN OWN AREA

	<u>1975</u>	<u>1973</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1967</u>
	%	%	%	%
Increasing	70	48	62	46
Decreasing	3	7	3	4
Remained the same	24	40	30	43
Not sure	3	5	5	7

When this year's results are analyzed demographically, some significant differences emerge by region and by size of place:

ESTIMATED CRIME RATE IN OWN AREA  
BY REGION AND SIZE OF PLACE

	<u>Increas-</u>	<u>Decreas-</u>	<u>About</u>	<u>Not</u>
	<u>ing</u>	<u>ing</u>	<u>Same</u>	<u>Sure</u>
	%	%	%	%
<u>Nationwide</u>	70	3	24	3
<u>By Region</u>				
East	67	3	26	4
Midwest	72	1	24	3
South	76	3	20	1
West	65	6	26	3
<u>By Size of Place</u>				
Big cities	70	3	24	3
Suburbs	70	3	24	3
Towns	78	2	17	3
Rural	67	2	28	3

(MORE)

Much the same pattern emerged when people were asked about their personal safety on the streets:

"Compared to a year ago, do you personally feel more uneasy on the streets, less uneasy, or not much different?"

FEEL PERSONALLY UNEASY ON THE STREETS

	<u>More Uneasy</u> %	<u>Less Uneasy</u> %	<u>Not Much Diff.</u> %	<u>Not Sure</u> %
1975	55	2	42	1
1973	51	5	43	1
1971	55	5	39	1
1969	55	4	39	2
1968	53	4	42	1
1966	49	3	44	4

After a drop-off in 1973, public apprehension on the streets is right back where it was in 1971. However, far and away the most unease on the streets is felt in the South and among women:

PERSONAL UNEASE ON STREETS  
BY REGION AND SEX

	<u>Feel More Uneasy</u> %
<u>Nationwide</u>	55
<u>By Region</u>	
East	54
Midwest	56
South	65
West	44
<u>By Sex</u>	
Men	47
Women	64

Although it is obvious that people in every part of the country are worried about rising crime, perhaps as an offshoot of the declining economic times and growing joblessness, but the center of apprehension has now shifted from the big cities of the North in the 1960's to the small towns of the South, where citizens are most aroused today.

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