

Nothing To Fear but Fear Itself?

● As a way of measuring the American public's perception of the threat of violence, in 1965 Gallup began asking Americans:

"Is there any area near where you live—that is, within a mile—where you would be afraid to walk alone at night?"

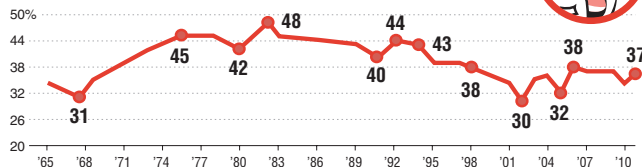
Responses show that the fear of violence increased over time until 1982. Perceptions then decreased to 30% in 2001, but have since gone back up to 37%.

Sources: Patrick E. Jamieson and Daniel Romer, "Violence in Popular U.S. Prime Time TV Dramas and the Cultivation of Fear: A Time Series Analysis," *Media and Communication* (2014) 2.2: 31-41.

http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1365&context=asc_papers; Gallup,

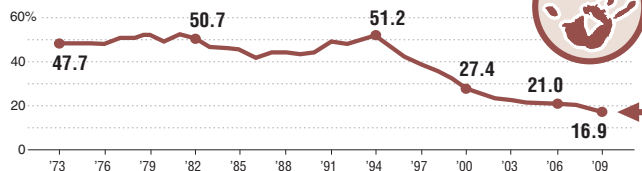
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/144272/nearly-americans-fear-walking-alone-night.aspx>

Percentage who said "Yes"

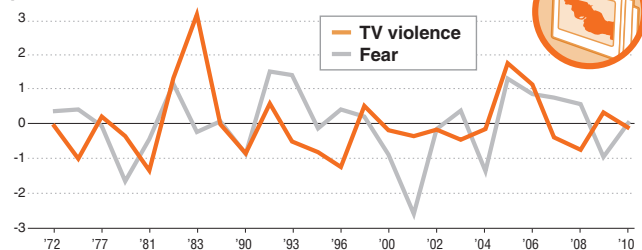


Total violent crime in the United States, 1973-2009

Victims, age 12 or older, per 1,000 population



Detrended standardized scores for TV violence rate per hour and fear of crime, 1972-2010



● Yet over roughly the same period, the actual rate of violent crime has dropped dramatically, falling from a high in 1994 of 51.2 victims per 1,000 to just 16.9 in 2009.

What explains the fact that the fear of violence doesn't rise and fall with the actual rate of violence?

● Jamieson and Romer's study measured the number of violent sequences per TV hour over roughly the same time frame, and their findings show that while the amount of violent content on television did not affect people's estimations of how dangerous the world around them was, it did make people more afraid of violence. The bottom graph here shows how instances of TV violence correlate to fear, using standardized scores that reflect how far above or below the overall average the scores are.

Jamieson and Romer give a more nuanced understanding of how cultivation may work. In their conclusion, they go back to one of Gerbner's chief concerns: that increasing amounts of televised violence could lead to increased fear, which could lead to people being supportive of authoritarian governance.