



PUBLIC SAFETY STUDY

Safe and Unsafe Canadian Cities

A national public safety perception study

National IVR survey of 1,500 Canadian adults
August 30-31, 2026

 **LIAISON**
STRATÉGIES



Dear Reader,

Ten years after the first Safe and Unsafe Cities study, it felt like the right time to bring this work back.

I have spent 13 years in public opinion research, first co-founding Mainstreet Research before going on to co-found Liaison Strategies. Safe and Unsafe Cities was a series that ran in 2016 and 2017 – but after I left it stopped. I always thought it was worth returning to because it asks a simple question with real consequences: which cities feel safe to Canadians, and which do not?

That matters because safety is not only a statistic. It is also a reputation, a memory, a headline, a story from a friend, or a moment someone sees on their phone. Those impressions affect how people talk about cities, whether they visit them, whether they invest in them, and what they expect from public leaders.

The way Canadians receive news has changed dramatically since this study first ran. The public conversation is faster, more fragmented, and often more emotional. This report brings the tracking back to understand where perception lines up with police-reported crime severity, and where the story Canadians carry is more complicated.

David Valentin

Co-founder, Liaison Strategies



Nobody's perfect.

But you can trust Liaison polls
because our methodologies have been tested
against real-world outcomes.

Ontario Poll Accuracy

- 1st **Liaison**
- 2nd **Mainstreet**
- 3rd **Innovative**
- 4th **Research Co.**
- 5th **Forum**
- 6th **Abacus**
- 7th **Pallas**
- 8th **Leger**
- 9th **Nanos**
- 10th **Ipsos**

Federal Poll Accuracy

- | | | | |
|------|---------------------|------|----------------|
| 1st | Mainstreet | 11th | Abacus |
| 2nd | Liaison | 12th | MQO |
| 3rd | Angus Reid | 13th | EKOS |
| 4th | Cardinal | 14th | Pollara |
| 5th | Nanos | 15th | IRG |
| 6th | Research Co. | | |
| 7th | Pallas | | |
| 8th | Leger | | |
| 9th | Forum | | |
| 10th | Ipsos | | |

There's no tougher race than an election campaign. Shifting headlines, commentary on leadership debates, and millions of voters changing their minds right up to the last minute. In the most recent 2025 elections, the accuracy of Liaison's polls ranked 1st provincially and 2nd federally. Next race, who knows? There's always room to improve. **Even at Liaison.**

Methodology

National IVR/RDD telephone survey of 1,500 Canadian adults, conducted August 30-31, 2026. Results are weighted to demographic and geographic targets. Margin of error: +/- 2.53 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Respondents were asked whether they consider each city very safe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe, very unsafe, or whether they did not know enough to say. City order was randomized.

Respondents were also asked what most shapes their impression of city safety: news coverage, personal experience, stories from friends or family, social media, crime statistics, a city's general reputation, something else, or not sure.

Cities tested: St. John's, Charlottetown, Halifax, Moncton, Quebec City, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver, and Victoria.



Safety reputations are built from more than crime data alone.

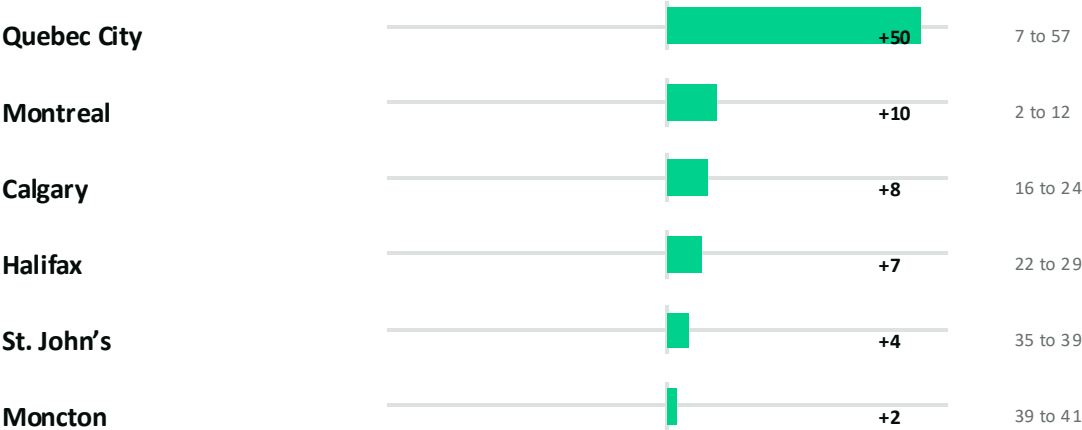
- 1 Ottawa and Quebec City lead the safety ranking; Winnipeg and Toronto sit at the bottom.
- 2 Only 12% say crime statistics most shape their impression.
- 3 The key story is the gap between how safe a city feels and what police-reported crime data says.

The report identifies where perception and official crime severity point in different directions.

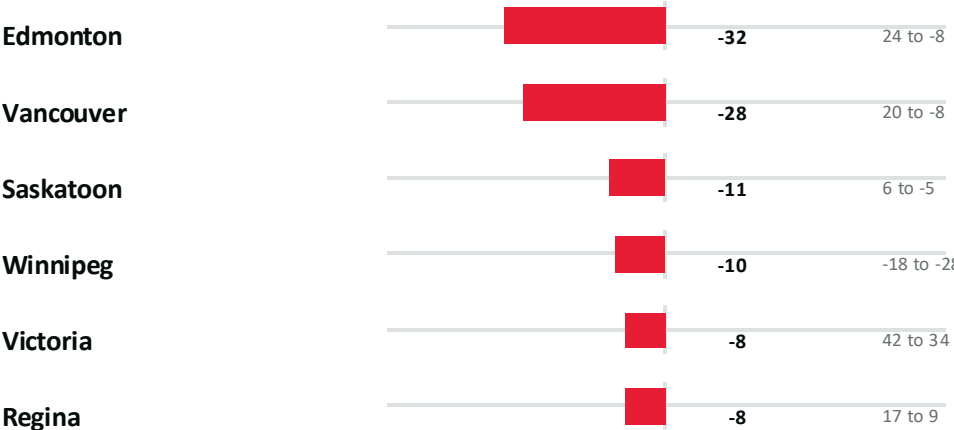
The map of perceived safety has changed since 2017

How each city's net safety score compares with the last Mainstreet Safe and Unsafe Cities study.

Biggest gains



Biggest declines



The strongest change is Quebec City, which moved from a modest positive score in 2017 to one of the strongest safety scores in the current study. The largest declines are concentrated in Edmonton and Vancouver.

Some anchors held; other city brands moved sharply

The return of the study makes the long view visible: Ottawa remains strong, Winnipeg remains the clearest safety concern, and the middle of the ranking has shifted.

City	2016 net	2017 net	Current net	Rank now
Ottawa	56	60	56	2/15
Quebec City	37	7	57	1/15
Toronto	-1	-12	-18	14/15
Winnipeg	-21	-18	-28	15/15
Vancouver	16	20	-8	13/15
Edmonton	11	24	-8	12/15

Long view: Ottawa and Winnipeg still anchor the series, while Quebec City, Vancouver, and Edmonton show how quickly reputations can move.



The study points to three public-safety realities

The safest and least safe city brands are clear, but the deeper story is about how Canadians form those judgments.

PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

Ottawa leads the ranking

75% say Ottawa is safe, ahead of Quebec City and Charlottetown. The top of the list is defined by broad comfort, not only low “very unsafe” scores.

REPUTATION RISK

Winnipeg is the main outlier

59% rate Winnipeg unsafe. Toronto is close behind despite a much lower police-reported Crime Severity Index than several western cities.

EVIDENCE GAP

Crime data is only one input

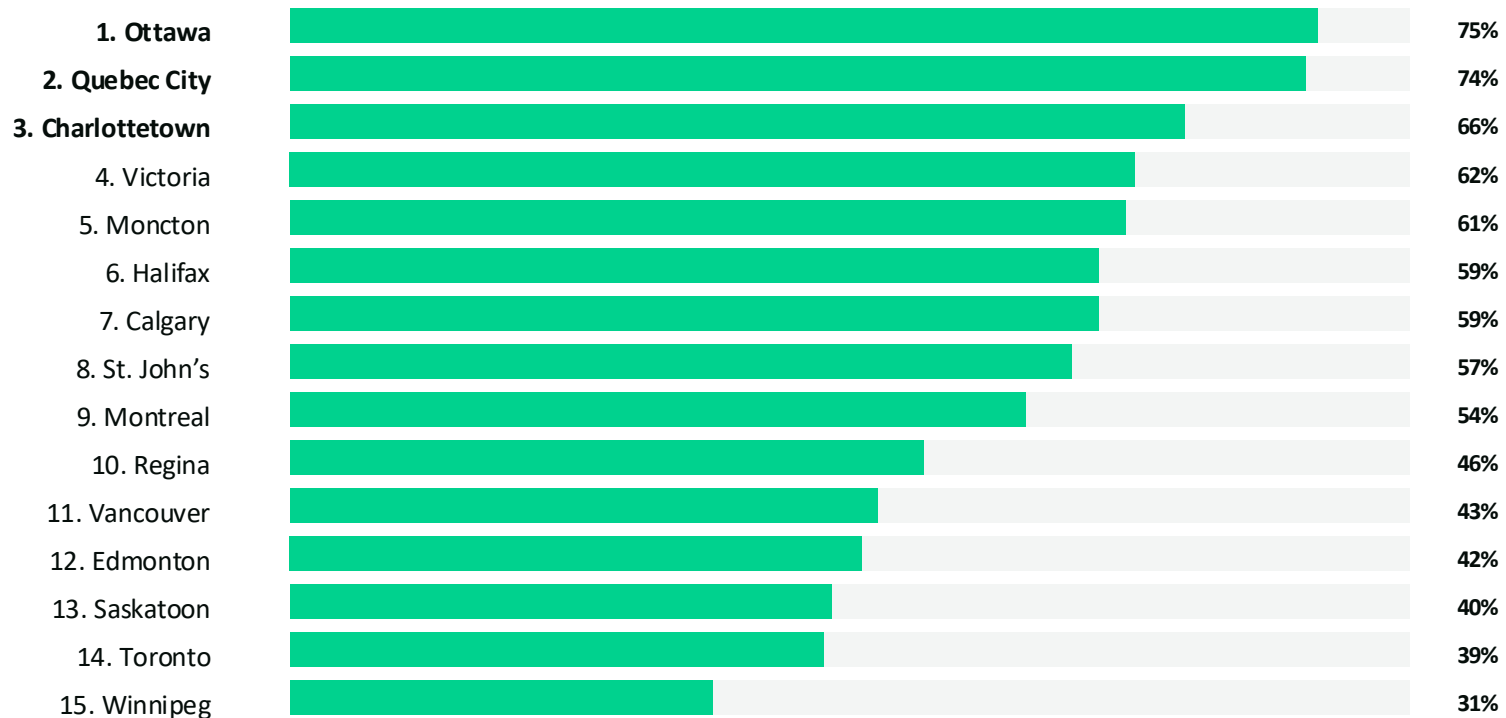
Only 12% say crime statistics most shape their impression. News, experience, stories, and reputation carry more weight.

Highest official crime-severity score among cities tested: Winnipeg, with a Crime Severity Index of 113.



Ottawa and Quebec City lead the safety ranking

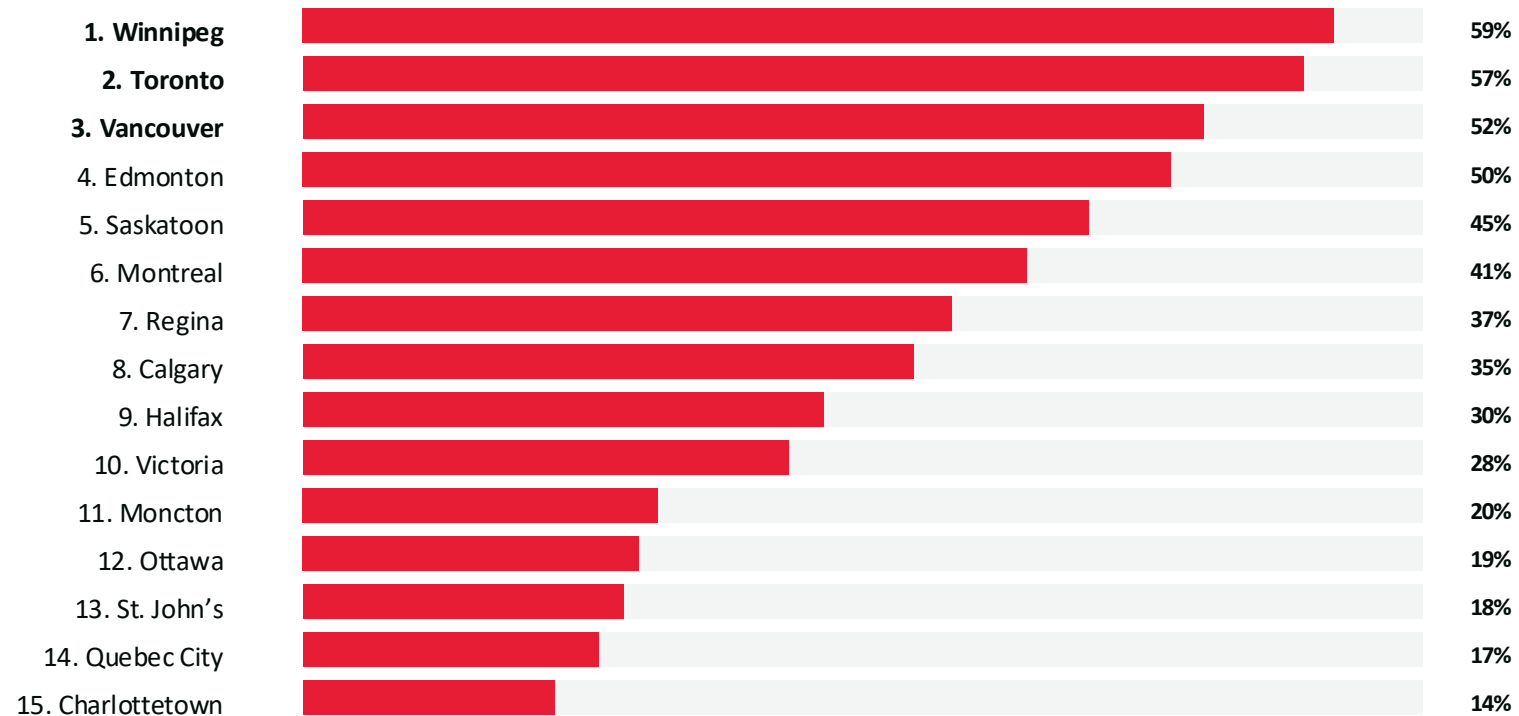
Share rating each city as very or somewhat safe.





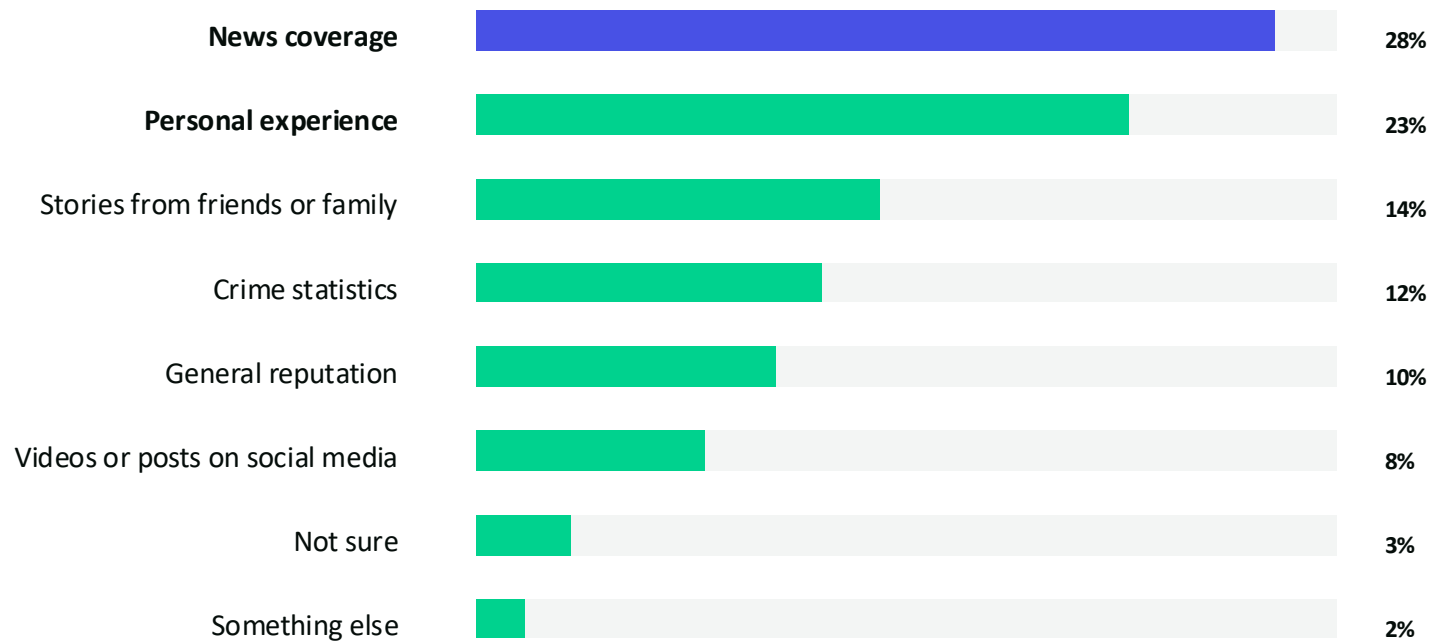
Winnipeg is the clearest perceived safety problem

Share rating each city as somewhat or very unsafe.



What shapes safety impressions

News coverage leads, while crime statistics are one input among several.



What it shows

Public impressions of safety are shaped by more than the official crime data alone.

Familiarity helps some cities and hurts others

Local familiarity can sharpen or soften a city's safety reputation compared with the national view.

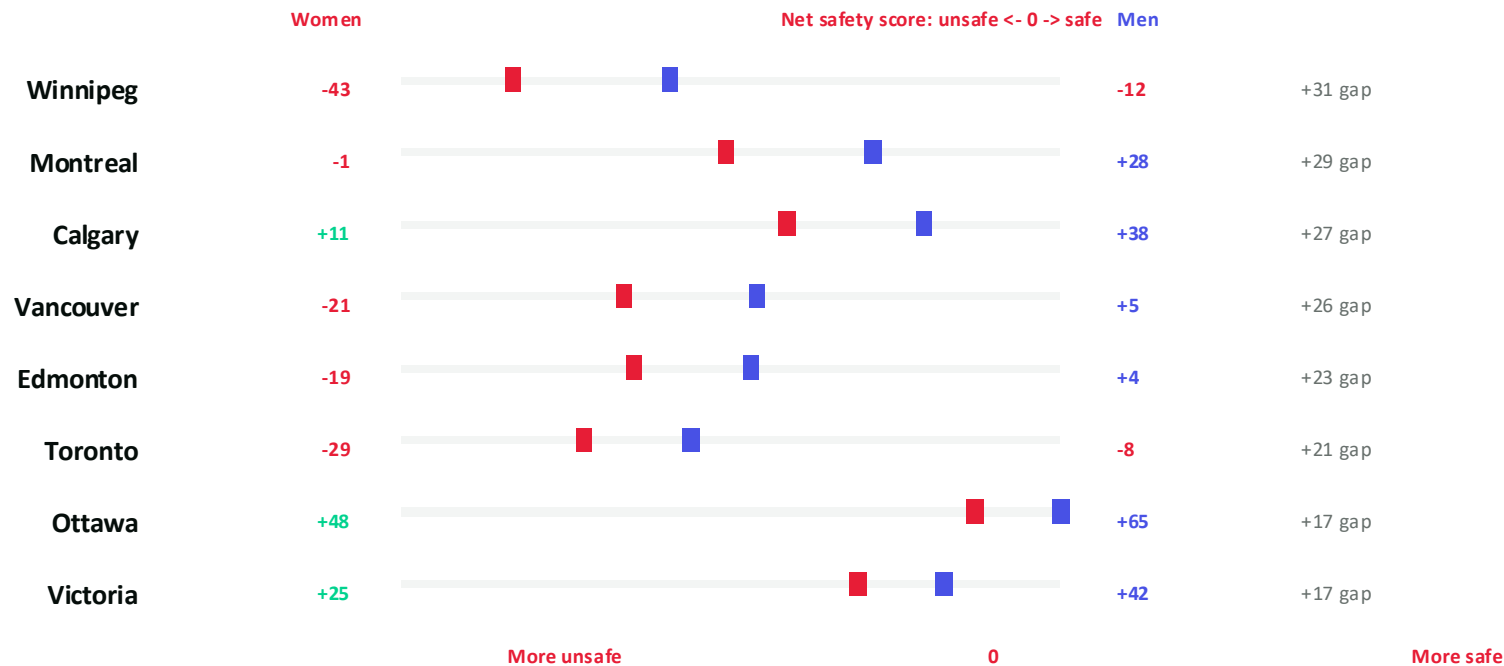


What to read

Local familiarity helps Moncton and Calgary most. It hurts Vancouver, Winnipeg, and Saskatoon.

Women see a sharper safety problem in several major cities

The gender gap is not evenly distributed. It is largest in cities already carrying a heavier safety burden.

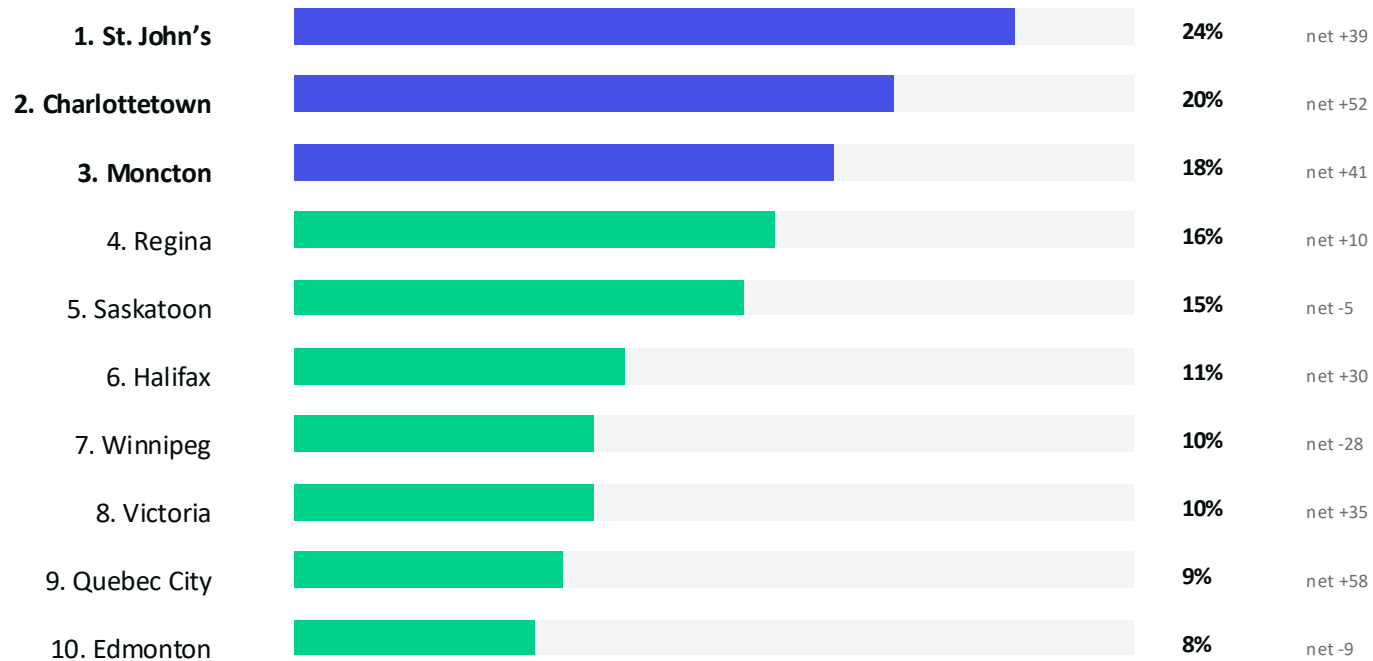


Why it matters

A city can have one national score, but the lived meaning of “safe” is not the same for every audience.

Unknown cities carry a different kind of reputation problem

“Do not know enough to say” is not a safety rating, but it matters: low awareness changes how confidently Canadians can place a city.



Interpretation

Less familiar cities are easier to define by a small number of memorable stories.



What is the Crime Severity Index?

Statistics Canada's Crime Severity Index is a police-reported measure of crime. More serious offences count more heavily than less serious offences.

OFFICIAL MEASURE

It is not a feeling score

It is based on crimes reported to police and weights serious offences more heavily.

PERCEPTION MEASURE

This survey asks the public

This survey asks whether each city feels safe or unsafe. Answers can reflect news, reputation, experience, and stories.

WHY COMPARE THEM

The gap matters

When they do not line up, a city's reputation may be stronger or weaker than the official measure suggests.

A higher Crime Severity Index means the police-reported crime mix is more severe.



Winnipeg leads the official severity measures

The Crime Severity Index can be read three ways: overall severity, violent crime severity, and non-violent crime severity.

Overall Crime Severity Index

1. Winnipeg	113
2. Moncton	106
3. Saskatoon	99
4. Edmonton	96
5. Regina	87

Violent Crime Severity Index

1. Winnipeg	170
2. Saskatoon	131
3. Regina	118
4. Edmonton	111
5. Moncton	108

Non-violent Crime Severity Index

1. Moncton	106
2. Winnipeg	92
3. Edmonton	90
4. Saskatoon	87
5. Vancouver	85

These are official police-reported measures. The following page compares the overall Crime Severity Index with how unsafe Canadians perceive each city to be.

The public ranking only partly tracks police-reported severity

Vertical axis: share saying unsafe. Horizontal axis: 2025 Crime Severity Index.



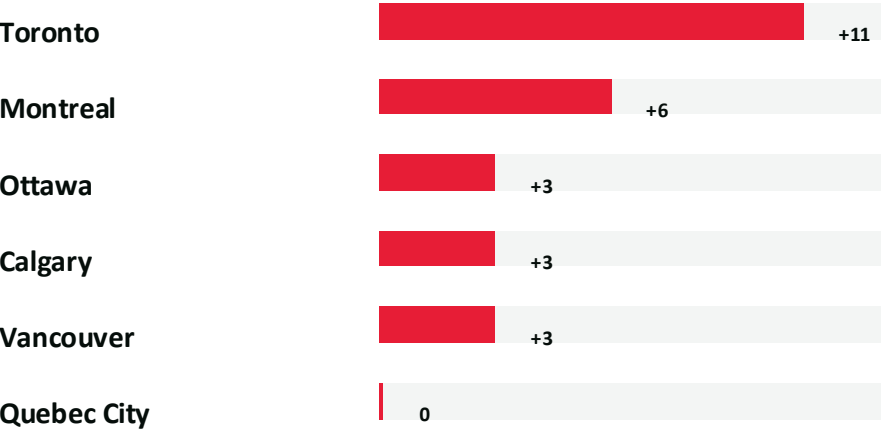
What stands out

Toronto feels less safe than its official crime-severity position suggests. Victoria is the reverse: higher official severity, but a more moderate unsafe rating.

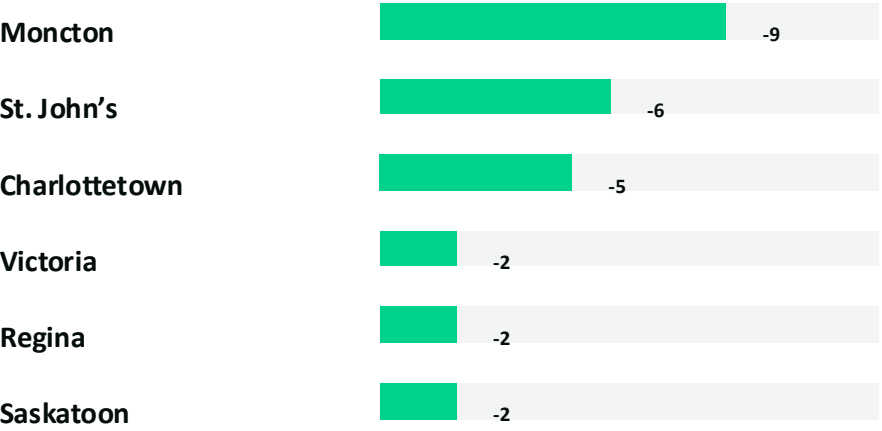
Some cities carry a reputational penalty

Gap score: official crime-severity rank minus perceived unsafe rank. Positive values mean a city is perceived as more unsafe than its official ranking.

Perceived worse than official data



Perceived better than official data



Four city stories emerge

Some cities look worse in public perception. Others look worse in official crime data.

Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton

Reputation pressure

Public concern is high compared with the official crime-severity position.

Ottawa, Quebec City, Charlottetown

Confidence advantage

These cities sit near the top of the perceived-safety ranking.

Victoria, Moncton

Official data outpaces perception

Police-reported severity is high, but public unsafe ratings are more moderate.

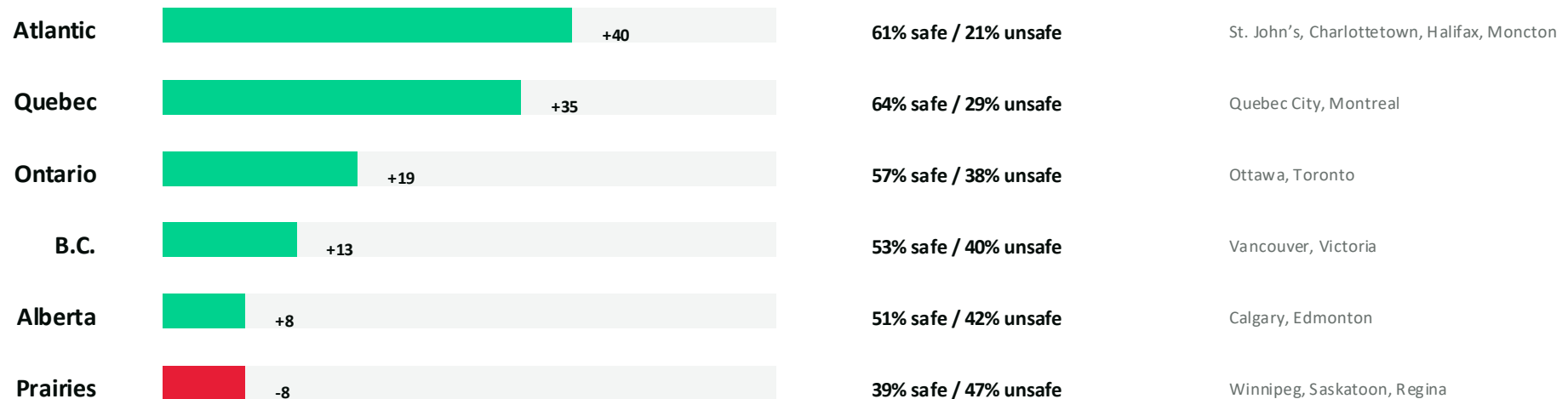
Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Montreal, Regina

Broad alignment

Public concern and official crime data both point to a more difficult safety profile.

The national picture is not a simple east-west divide

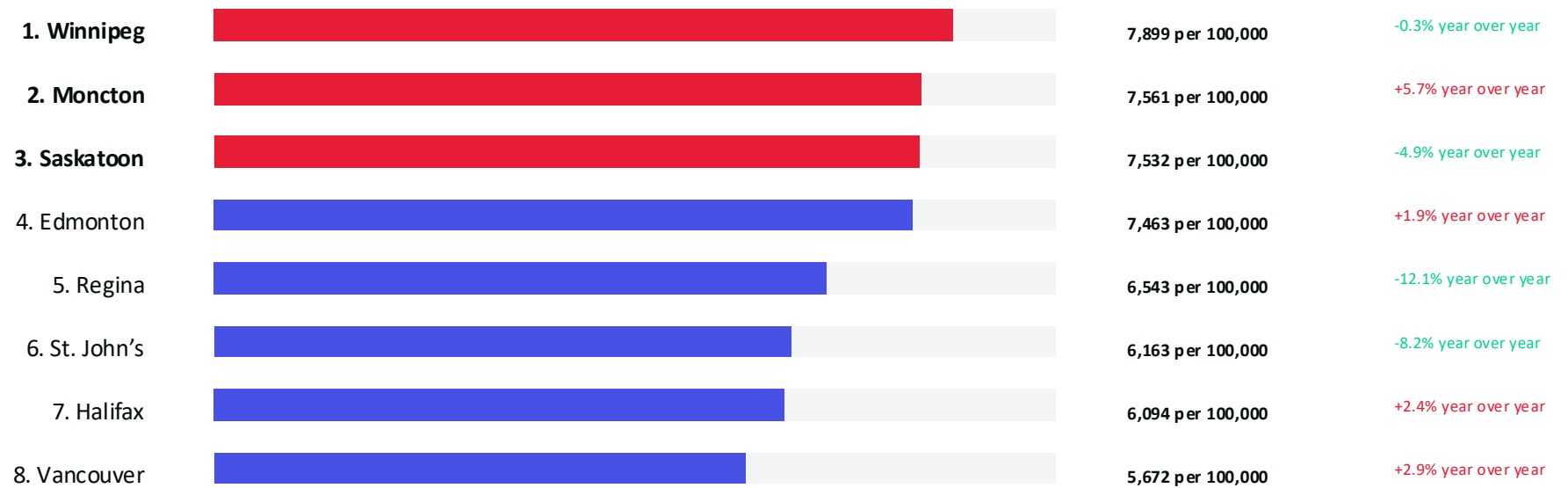
Perception is city-specific: western cities include both strong concern and relative confidence, while Ontario contains the clearest big-city reputational penalty.



The largest contrasts happen within regions: Ottawa versus Toronto, Calgary versus Edmonton, and Victoria versus Vancouver.

Winnipeg, Moncton and Saskatoon have the highest reported crime rates

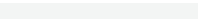
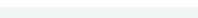
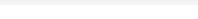
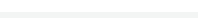
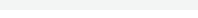
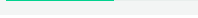
Crime rate counts police-reported Criminal Code incidents per 100,000 people. It adds a frequency view to the Crime Severity Index, which weights offences by seriousness.



The frequency story reinforces the severity story: Winnipeg ranks high on both measures, while Moncton and Saskatoon also sit near the top of the reported-crime-rate list.

City topline, in plain English

Safe = very/somewhat safe. Unsafe = somewhat/very unsafe. Safety score = safe minus unsafe.

City	Safe	Unsafe	Don't know	Safety score
Ottawa	75% 	19% 	5%	+56
Quebec City	74% 	17% 	9%	+57
Charlottetown	66% 	14% 	20%	+52
Victoria	62% 	27% 	10%	+35
Moncton	61% 	20% 	18%	+41
Halifax	59% 	30% 	11%	+29
Calgary	59% 	35% 	6%	+24
St. John's	57% 	19% 	24%	+38
Montreal	54% 	41% 	5%	+13
Regina	46% 	37% 	16%	+9
Vancouver	43% 	51% 	5%	-8
Edmonton	42% 	50% 	8%	-8
Saskatoon	40% 	45% 	15%	-5
Toronto	39% 	57% 	4%	-18
Winnipeg	31% 	59% 	10%	-28



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Contact

For the full report, crosstabs, methodology details, or a briefing on the findings.

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