

Crime and Security in European Capitals

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based on the data of the European International Crime Survey (EU ICS), Gallup Europe*

Abstract

This short study explores crime in European capitals. The focus of attention is to see how citizens react to crime, under what circumstances they decide to report it to the police or increase their own use of security devices. The European data support findings in other countries that only a relatively small fraction of criminal incidents gets reported to the police, it is 50% in European capitals overall, and even less for violent crimes. Many citizens say that they do not report crimes because they feel the police would not or could not do anything. When police might be unable to act, traditional security devices and practices could work. Europeans overwhelmingly (90%) use some form of security and safety measures to protect their households, especially those who were victimized in the past five years.

I. SATISFACTION WITH THE POLICE

1. The Majority of Residents Think that Police in European Capitals Do a Good Job in Controlling Crime but Victims of Crimes are Less Positive about the Police

The majority of the people living in European capital cities rate the performance of their police force as either very good or fairly good. On average, 72% of the residents of European capitals believe that taking everything into account, the police in their area do a good job in controlling crime (See Table 1). Residents of Helsinki (89%), Edinburgh (84%), Copenhagen (83%), and Vienna (83%) give the best ratings to their police. The least satisfied are residents of Rome and Athens, 60% and 52% respectively saying that the police are doing a good job in reducing crime. On the aggregate level, capitals with good police forces are not always the same with low crime prevalence rates. While Helsinki and Edinburgh score well in both rankings, Lisbon and Luxembourg both have low victimization rates but their police force is rated average (See Table 2).

Table 1
European Capitals with Good Police Forces,
% of Residents Saying the Police is doing a Good Job

	Good job (%)		Good job (%)
Helsinki	89	Berlin	70
Edinburgh	84	Stockholm	69
Copenhagen	83	Luxembourg	69
Vienna	83	Belfast	68
Dublin	82	Paris	67
London	79	Brussels	63
Budapest	77	Madrid	61
Amsterdam	74	Rome	60
Lisbon	70	Athens	52
		TOTAL	72

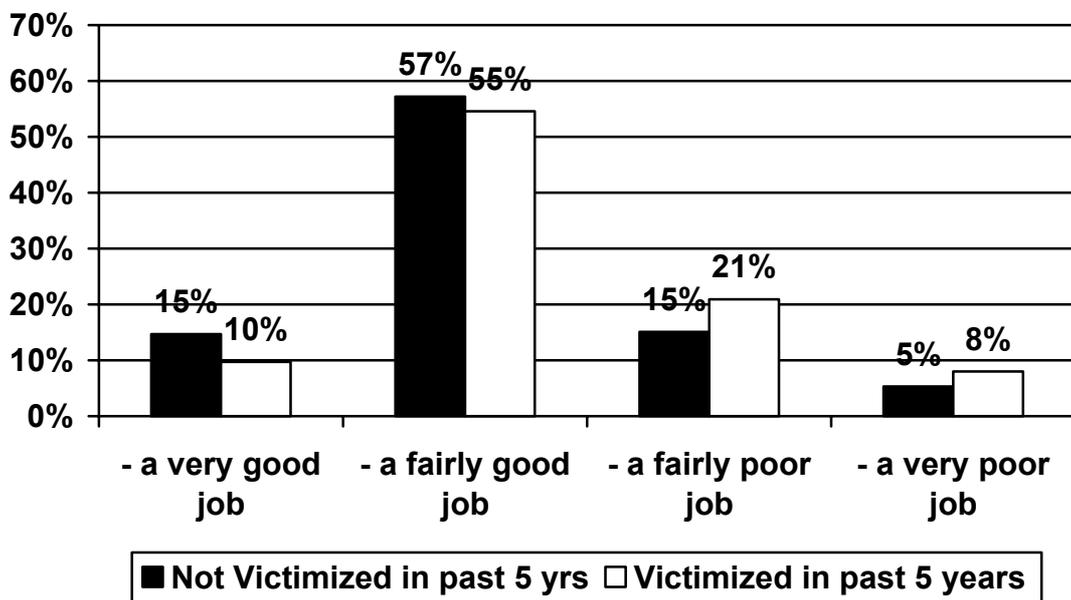
Table 2
Safest European Capitals
% of Citizens Not Victimized in the past 5 Years

	% Not Victimized in Past 5 years		% Not Victimized in Past 5 years
Lisbon	57	Berlin	43
Helsinki	57	Vienna	43
Edinburgh	54	Stockholm	43
Luxembourg	51	Paris	43
Belfast	50	Dublin	43
Madrid	46	Athens	42
Budapest	44	Copenhagen	37
Brussels	44	London	37
Rome	43	Amsterdam	31
		TOTAL	45

Looking at the individual level, one can find significant differences between the ratings of those who were victimized in the past five years and those who were not. People who fell victim of crime in the previous five years are less likely to rate the police as doing a good job in controlling crime. Five percentage point less people believe that the police is doing a very good job among those who were victimized (10%) as opposed to those who were not (15%). Almost one in ten people (8%) who were victimized in the past five years say that the police are doing a very poor job in reducing crime.

Figure 1 reveals that considering all the capitals in Europe, there is a significant relationship at the individual level between the prevalence rate of the 10 major forms of crimes (victimized or not) in the past five years and satisfaction with police (whether they think the police does a good or a poor job). In some countries, the gap is even more dramatic than in the pooled data base of all countries, people who were victimized at least once in the past five years in Helsinki, for example, are more than twice as likely to rate the police as doing a poor job (15%) than those who were not victimized (7%). Similarly, in Edinburgh 22% of those victimized in the past five years think the police are doing a poor job, while only 9% of those who did not experience crime during that time period rate the police as doing a poor job.

Figure 1
% of People Rating the Police's Work in Controlling Crime*



* Significant at the 95% confidence level, using Chi-square statistics.

II. REPORTING CRIME TO POLICE

1. In Half of the Cases Citizens Decide Not to Report Crimes

While undoubtedly police plays the major role in fighting crime in European capitals, they are not always informed about all the crimes occurring under their jurisdiction. Unreported crimes present a serious challenge in drawing a realistic picture of crime in a city, as many as half of the crimes are not represented in crime statistics or on police maps and thus evade the eyes of crime fighters.

On average, only half of the crimes get reported to the police. People are most likely to report the theft of expensive items such as cars, 89% of such cases are reported to the police. This is closely followed by motorcycle theft (82%), burglary and housebreakings (81%), theft from a car (63%), robbery (59%), and theft of personal property (54%) (Table 3). Attempted burglary and housebreakings are reported in less than half (45%) of the cases. Emotionally sensitive and violent crimes such as assault and sexual incidents including rape are even less likely to be reported to the police, only 35% of the assaults and 28% of the sexual incidents are reported. At the bottom of the list are cases of consumer fraud (9%) and corruption (6%).

Table 3
% of Victims Reporting a Crime in European Capitals

Car Theft	90
Motorcycle Theft	82
Burglary/Housebreaking	81
Theft from a Car	63
Robbery	59
Theft of Personal Property	54
Bicycle Theft	50
Attempted Burglary/Housebreaking	43
Assault	35
Rape	28
Consumer Fraud	9
Corruption	6
TOTAL	50

The underreporting of crimes is a major obstacle for the police as well as to policy makers to know exactly what types of crimes to fight. It is very important that the police make every effort so that citizens feel confident enough to report all crimes happening to them or in their neighborhood. Police can do more to engage citizens so that there is a closer bond between victims and crime fighters. There is a lot to learn from the experience of those who already reported a crime. While being a victim itself is stressful, citizens reporting crimes are not always satisfied with the way they were treated by the police.

Only 58% of the people who report theft from a car in European capitals are satisfied with the way the police dealt with their matter. Sixty-eight percent of those

contacting the police feel that the police did not do enough, 59% feel that the police was not interested in their case. A large proportion of crime victims (58%) are not satisfied with the police because they did not find or apprehend the offender, and 54% says the police did not recover the stolen property.

The personal interaction with the police officers is also crucial in driving satisfaction with the police. Almost half of the people being dissatisfied with the police after reporting theft from a car say that the police didn't keep them informed properly (48%) and almost a quarter say that they were impolite (24%). Thirty-one percent mention that the police were too slow to arrive and that is why they are not satisfied with their service. There is certainly room for improvement in these areas.

Even though 86% of those who suffer from some form of sexual assault including rape consider the assault as a serious incident, they are very unlikely to contact the police. But even if they do, they are not always satisfied with their interaction with the authorities. Less than two thirds (60%) of those who do inform the police are satisfied with the way they dealt with their matter. More than half of those contacting the police (53%) feel that the police was not interested in their case. People feel uneasy to contact the police about such sensitive crimes and more than half of the victims of sexual assaults (56%) feel that it would have been useful if there was a specialized agency to help after the incident.

There seems to be a large degree of skepticism about the police in European capitals that could act as a barrier to reporting crimes. While there is a diverse range of reasons why burglary victims do not contact the police, the majority of the reasons stem from the belief that the police would not or could not do anything or that their case was inappropriate for police attention. When people were asked why they did not report a burglary that happened to them, 38% report that they thought the incident was not serious enough to require police attention, one quarter thought that the incident was inappropriate for police and it was unnecessary to report, another 22% thought that the police would not do anything about it, and 20% believed that the police could do nothing in their case.

Sometimes crimes are solved without the help of the police. Fifteen percent of the victims of burglary solved the case themselves or knew who did it. In another 11% of the cases the victim's family resolved the case. Four percent reported to other authorities instead of the police. Six percent did not report the burglary because they are afraid of the police, and 5% did not report for fear of reprisal.

III. SECURITY DEVICES AND PRACTICES

1. Traditional Methods Top the List of Security Devices and Practices in European Capitals

While only half the crimes are reported to the police, most households in European capital cities are conscious about security and only one in ten households do not use any of the well-known security devices and practices such as alarms, neighborhood watch, or special locks to name but a few to protect their homes (Table 4). However, there is a large degree of variation among countries ranging from 2% to 25%.

Residents of Madrid, Edinburgh, and Paris are the least likely to protect their homes, around a quarter (between 22 and 25%) of the households in those capitals do not use any of the listed security devices. Residents of London and Budapest pay the most attention to security, as only 2% of the households report not using any of the listed security devices or practices.

Table 4
% of Households without Security / Anti-Burglar Device

Madrid	25	Stockholm	8
Edinburgh	23	Amsterdam	7
Paris	22	Helsinki	7
Copenhagen	15	Vienna	7
Athens	12	Belfast	6
Berlin	12	Luxemburg	4
Brussels	11	Dublin	4
Lisbon	11	Budapest	2
Rome	10	London	2
		TOTAL	11

There are two very popular methods of protecting homes in European capitals, one is a physical device and the other one is community-based protection scheme. By far, the most popular security devices are special door locks, 61% of the homes are protected by those. Also very important are friendly arrangements with neighbors to watch each other's houses as 54% of the households use this traditional practice. These two are followed by exterior motion activated lighting (23%), special window and door grilles (22%), burglar alarm that gives sound or flash signals on location (21%), formal neighbor watch scheme (20%). Dogs are still popular against burglars as 16% of the homes keep a dog to detect burglars. The least widely used security facilities are caretakers or security guards (15%), high fences (14%), and a burglar alarm connected to security services or to the police (13%).

2. Households That Experienced Burglary or Home Break-ins in the Previous Five Years are More likely to Use Security Devices than Homes without such Experience

It is somewhat difficult to judge how successful these security devices are in deterring crime. Looking at the usage patterns, one can easily see that it is those who were victimized at least once in the previous five years who are more likely to have security devices (Figure 2). Except for security guards, burglarized homes are significantly more likely to have individual security devices installed or use other security practices. For example while 27% of those whose homes were burglarized or broken into the previous year report that their houses have burglar alarm that gives sound or flash signals on location, only 20% of those who were not victimized report having such security device. However, there is still plenty of room to increase the safety of homes in European capitals. Relatively few homes are equipped with modern security devices, even among those households that were burglarized in the past five years a little more than one in every four has motion activated lighting (26%), a burglar alarm that gives out signs on location or window/door grilles (27%) and only 16% have an alarm system that is connected to police or security services.

Figure 2
% of Households Using Security Devices or Practices

