

## CRIME IN POLAND IN THE 1990s

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### Summary

The paper is an appraisal of crime in Poland in the 1990s. Crime in Poland is looked at from three different though related perspectives: crime known to the police, unrecorded crime and attitudes of citizens towards crime. The paper discusses the types of crime in terms of prevalence and how it has changed during the period of political and economic transition (e.g. growth of violent crime, spread of economic offences, increase in the activity of organized crime). Each of the three perspectives is also described in terms of data available and from the point of view of methodological differences in the way the data were collected before and after the fall of communism. These differences are important as otherwise they may lead misinterpretations of crime trends. Furthermore, the paper provides a discussion of the role of media in shaping citizens' attitudes towards crime and their perceptions of safety. The paper also discusses the results of numerous public opinion surveys about the relative importance of safety and crime versus other problems facing Poland.

1. This paper proposes to look at crime in Poland in the 'nineties from three related but different perspectives: 1) crime known to the police, 2) victimisation by crime and 3) fear of crime. The above perspectives are considered to be supplementary rather than exclusive, and there is no need to choose between them. None of them is "better" than any other, since each offers some insight into one of many aspects of crime as a social phenomenon.

Crime known to the police tells us on the one hand what incidents perceived by the public as being of a criminal character are reported to the police or are noted by the police themselves, and on the other hand, what offences are investigated by the police. Victimisation surveys provide information among others on how often the members of the public feel having been victims of incidents of a criminal character, or they report these incidents to the police, and finally what kind of measures they adopt to prevent victimisation. Public opinion polls give some insight into such problems as the feeling of being safe from or threatened by crime, the necessity of changing daily routines to avoid victimisation, etc.

All these three sources also provide data on 1) the criminal justice system, 2) the ways

it operates, and 3) its perception by the public. These are, however, separate subjects beyond the scope of this paper.

2. The data on offences reported to the police are published in the Polish police statistics, which, instead, use a unit called “established offences”, i.e. incidents whose criminal character has been proved by a police investigation. Only offences of this kind are entered in the police statistics, and are referred to as “recorded offences”. In other words, reported offences are in some way screened by the police and some of them – sometimes rightly, sometimes wrongly – do not find their place in the police statistics. This phenomenon or reporting to the police incidents erroneously considered to be of a criminal character is universal, however, in many countries reported incidents are also those recorded. This is not the case in Poland.

The system adopted in Poland has some merits, but it also offers ample opportunities for manipulation with data and it seems that in the ‘seventies and ‘eighties these opportunities were used for political purposes. In Table 1, the numbers and rates of recorded offences are provided beginning from 1970, i.e. the first year the present Penal Code was introduced. For many years these numbers and rates have remained constant or even showed a slight tendency downward. Such a trend was in agreement with what the authorities wished. This was achieved, among other things, by the reduction in the number of offences recorded (irrespective of how many offences were reported) and by passing amnesty laws. The latter were instituted partly for political purposes and partly in order to alleviate the burden of criminal cases from law enforcement agencies and other segments of the criminal justice system. In the ‘eighties, crime started to rise in spite of trebling the number of amnesty laws passed and the adoption of other laws and practices intended to reduce the number of recorded offences.

**Table 1. Offences recorded by the police**

| Year   | Number  | Rate #   |
|--------|---------|----------|
| 1970   | 424 217 | 1304,2   |
| 1971   | 475 411 | 1449,2   |
| 1972   | 379 086 | 1146,4   |
| 1974*  | 355 125 | 1064,4   |
| 1974   | 339 542 | 1007,8   |
| 1975   | 340 440 | 1000,6   |
| 1976   | 324 181 | 943,4    |
| 1977*  | 344 506 | 992,9    |
| 1978   | 355 492 | 1017,8   |
| 1979   | 337 302 | 956,7    |
| 1980   | 337 935 | 949,8    |
| 1981*  | 379 762 | 1057,8   |
| 1982   | 436 206 | 1204,1   |
| 1983*  | 466 205 | 1274,8   |
| 1984*  | 538 930 | 1460,0   |
| 1985   | 544 361 | 1463,2   |
| 1986*  | 507 913 | 1356,0   |
| 1987   | 508 533 | 1350,2   |
| 1988   | 475 273 | 1255,3   |
| 1989** | 547 589 | 1442,4   |
| 1990   | 883 346 | 2317,3   |
| 1991   | 866 095 | 2264,6   |
| 1992   | 881 076 | 2296,6   |
| 1993   | 852 507 | 2216,7   |
| 1994   | 906 157 | 2351,0   |
| 1995   | 974 941 | 2526,6   |
| 1996   | 897 751 | 2324,7   |
| 1997   | 992 373 | ≠ 2568,3 |

# Per 100 000 population

≠ Provisional number

\* Amnesty law(s)

With the onset of the transition period in 1989, the political pressure on the police to make the country look like a place with little crime was lifted. Soon, the official figures of offences recorded exhibited a sharp rise. Already in 1990, the number and rate of recorded offences nearly doubled in comparison with those of 1989. However, this increase in crime cannot be entirely attributed to the lack of the above mentioned political pressure or greater readiness on the part of the police officials to accept complaints from the members of the public about criminally looking incidents and to record them. There is plenty of evidence that a real rise in crime also occurred.

In the 'nineties, judging from official figures, the level of crime seems to be rather stable (Table 2). The small ups and downs in these figures should be probably attributed mainly to the pressures put by the police on the Government to obtain more money for salaries and for new equipment. When such pressures were exerted, recorded crime tended to increase. Once the required appropriations had been granted crime tended to decrease. This general picture should not create an impression that no structural changes in crime pattern occurred. This problem will be referred to later.

Table 2. Groups or types of offences recorded by the police

| Year                               | 1989     | 1990           | 1991           | 1992           | 1993           | 1994           | 1995           | 1996           | 1997           |
|------------------------------------|----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Total                              | 547 589  | 883 346<br>100 | 866 095<br>98  | 881 076<br>100 | 852 507<br>96  | 906 157<br>103 | 974 941<br>110 | 897 751<br>102 | 992 373<br>112 |
| Homicide*                          | 556      | 730<br>100     | 971<br>133     | 989<br>135     | 1 106<br>152   | 1 160<br>159   | 1 134<br>155   | 1 134<br>155   | 1 093<br>150   |
| Assault                            | 8 588    | 10 415<br>100  | 12 956<br>124  | 13 795<br>132  | 16 646<br>160  | 18 454<br>177  | 18 091<br>174  | 19 371<br>186  | 20 506<br>197  |
| Battery                            | 2 988    | 3 935<br>100   | 5 553<br>141   | 6 060<br>154   | 7 285<br>185   | 9 223<br>234   | 10 600<br>269  | 11 575<br>294  | 13 005<br>330  |
| Focible rape                       | 1 660    | 1 840<br>100   | 1 921<br>104   | 1 911<br>104   | 1 976<br>107   | 2 039<br>111   | 2 267<br>123   | 1 985<br>108   | 2 260<br>123   |
| Robbery                            | 9 067    | 16 217<br>100  | 17 094<br>105  | 17 715<br>109  | 21 034<br>130  | 23 574<br>145  | 26 858<br>166  | 26 257<br>162  | 30 063<br>185  |
| Burglary                           | 218 581  | 431 058<br>100 | 355 896<br>83  | 330 741<br>77  | 314 338<br>73  | 304 293<br>71  | 304 899<br>71  | 305 703<br>71  | 324 017<br>75  |
| Theft                              | 105 129  | 158 785<br>100 | 139 507<br>88  | 125 074<br>79  | 134 089<br>84  | 180 514<br>114 | 211 514<br>133 | 157 479<br>99  | 184 368<br>116 |
| Traffic offences                   | 21 705   | 29 141<br>100  | 35 568<br>122  | 30 753<br>106  | 29 578<br>101  | 32 030<br>110  | 35 005<br>120  | 34 863<br>120  | 40 202<br>138  |
| Car theft**                        | 7 935    | 14 691<br>100  | 18 610<br>127  | 29 664<br>202  | 34 452<br>235  | 45 999<br>313  | 54 807<br>373  | 50 799<br>346  |                |
| Drug offences                      | 2 681    | 1 755<br>100   | 3 086<br>176   | 3 013<br>172   | 6 118<br>349   | 5482<br>312    | 4 987<br>284   | 7 347<br>419   |                |
| Suspects (all ages)                | 214 513  | 267 553<br>100 | 305 031<br>100 | 307 569<br>100 | 299 499<br>100 | 388 855<br>100 | 423 896<br>100 | 381 911<br>100 | 410 844<br>100 |
| Foreign suspects                   | 957<br>0 | 719<br>0       | 2 402<br>1     | 3 575<br>1     | 3 010<br>1     | 3 983<br>1     | 6 349<br>2     | 6 956<br>2     | 8 306<br>2     |
| Clearance rate (all offences)      | 55,5     | 40,1           | 48,3           | 53,1           | 53,5           | 54,2           | 54,2           | 54,4           | 53,5           |
| Clearance rate (suspect unknown)** |          |                |                |                |                |                |                |                | 22,1           |

\* Completed & attempted (Attempts consist of about 25 % of all homicides recorded).

\*\* Incl. car theft while committing a robbery.

\*\*\* At the moment the offences were reported (selected offences).

Socialist countries were notorious for very high clearance rates, unbelievably high in the opinion of specialists in the field of police science. Poland was no exception. After a dramatic fall in 1990 (to 40 per cent) from the already low previous level of 55 per cent in 1989, the overall clearance rate nearly reached the 1989 level in the subsequent years (Table 2). This rate is often regarded as a measure of police efficiency. However, it is a misleading measure since many offences are cleared (i.e. the suspect is known) at the moment the crime became known to the police. This is the case, for example, in most traffic offences. Therefore, in the last years, apart from the overall clearance rates, clearance rates have also been published – for a wide selection of offences – for cases in which the suspect was unknown at the moment the offence was reported. In the years 1996-1997, only about one in five such offences became finally cleared (Table 2). In 1997, the overall clearance rates and the rates in cases of an unknown suspect were in homicide 86 and 76 per cent respectively, in robbery 61 and 39, in burglary 30 and 17, and in theft 29 and 15. The latter rates seem to be a much more realistic estimate of police efficiency than the overall clearance rates.

In a number of European countries, the offences committed by foreigners are considered to merit special attention. It is often that the public attributes much more crime to foreigners than they really commit. The same is true for Poland. First of all, in spite of a twelve fold increase in the number of foreign offenders between the years 1990 and 1997, foreigners account for barely 2 per cent of all suspects (Table 2). Most of these foreigners are people from our neighbouring countries, in particular Ukraine, Bielorus, Russian Federation, Germany and Lithuania. The foreigners, like Polish citizens, mostly commit some forms of theft; then traffic violations, and violations of laws regulating their stay in this country. However, a lot of crime, such as extortion, robberies, etc., is believed to be committed by foreigners against other foreigners. These are cases that are seldom reported to the police.

In the 'nineties, despite the relatively constant level of crime recorded (a general rise by only 12 per cent from 1990 to 1997), in some offences the increase has been larger. This is particularly true for serious violent offences, such as homicide (by 50 per cent), assault (by 97 per cent), battery (more than twice), and robbery (by 85 per cent). On the other hand, offences against property decreased, e.g. burglary, or showed only a small increase, e.g. theft. The largest increase was found in car theft (here the number more than tripled), and in drug offences (a four fold increase) (Table 2).

3. There is an old joke about statistics, it is reputed to be like a bikini suit: what it reveals is interesting, but what it hides is vital. The true picture of crime pattern and of its social significance can neither be found in criminal statistics, nor inferred from there, mainly because there are vast areas of criminal activity which are not represented in this statistics at all or only marginally.

The process of transition from political subordination to national independence, from the authoritarian to a democratic form of government and from centrally planned to a market economy left the postcommunist countries – in spite of all diversity – with similar problems. The differences between these countries are as far as crime is concerned more of size and of gravity than of character. In Poland, three forms of crime seem to be of greatest importance since they pose a serious threat to the society: criminal violence, economic crime, and organized crime.

It has been often pointed out that one of the traits of crime in a period of transition is its violent character. Crime is said to have become more brutal, committed with unprecedented

cruelty, with more indifference towards the suffering of the victim. This is probably true, however, one has to remember that the socialist state was per se a very violent organization. It was governed in accordance with an ideology of struggle with enemies rather than that of conciliation and consensus. Apart from institutional violence, there was also much personal violence among people, particularly in the behaviour of public functionaries, police officers included, towards citizens. What happened in the transition period was the “privatization” of violence and, as a consequence, its diffusion throughout the society, which made it much more visible, annoying and even dangerous to the people. Violence in a weak state, i.e. a state unable to execute properly its own laws, meets with little resistance and tends to spread, and for some people become a convenient and efficient way of pursuing their ends.

The economic crime is barely reflected in criminal statistics. This is not a specifically Polish phenomenon. Economic offences are widespread in every country, but they are probably more frequent in the countries on the road to market economy. The process of transition has provided fertile soil for perpetrating such offences. The new ideology of entrepreneurship, a drive to engage in business, or to become self employed, and to get quickly rich, pursued in a society which within its state apparatus has people feeling less loyal to the duties of office, produced mass corruption. Many public officials are prepared to take decisions and share confidential information for personal benefit. Such decisions may relate to granting licences, providing subsidies, assigning import and export quotas, exemptions from taxes and customs duties, etc. Privatization also proved to generate crime (corruption) since in its process many decisions have to be taken and they may be taken arbitrarily.

Apart from graft taking and giving there are many other forms of economic offences common in Poland. Most of them could be shortly described as fraudulent dealings with partners or competitors on the market, with the public (i.e. with customers buying goods and services), with the state (tax evasion, taking credits with no intent to pay them back, customs fraud, claiming undue insurance, etc.). From a strictly legal point of view the whole “gray” sphere of economy – which in Poland according to some estimates constitute about 30 per cent of the GNP – is illegal and, in many instances, even criminal.

Another threat in Poland is organized crime. Its dealings can be regarded as being some sort of business activity. They include the areas of production, commerce, as well as services. In the area of production, organized crime in Poland is known, in particular, for synthetic drugs, forged documents, counterfeit money. In the area of commerce, organized crime is involved first of all in the distribution of own products, although part of them goes abroad, and in all sorts of smuggled goods, viz. narcotic drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, non-ferrous metals, electronic equipment, etc. Finally, organized crime is involved in such activities as providing services, money laundering, protection racket, retrieval of debts from debtors unwilling to pay them back, prostitution, transportation of smuggled goods (cars, narcotic drugs, alcohol, arms, art objects, cigarettes, luxury goods, etc.) and people (illegal immigrants) through the country. In Poland, organized crime becomes more and more international; its new ties make it particularly dangerous and difficult to control.

4. Victimisation surveys have been for more than two decades a well established source of data on crime, on some aspects of the attitudes towards the criminal justice system, and on safety measures taken by citizens. They are an alternative source of data, which means that they are independent of the work of the investigative and prosecuting authorities, do not rely on the documentation of activities, and compilations of statistic done

by these authorities. Unfortunately, these surveys, based on national samples of the population, were not carried out in Poland in the 'eighties and earlier. This is a great pity because we have been deprived of a possibility to compare the extent of crime before and after the beginning of the transformation using a relatively reliable tool.

In several countries (e.g. U.S.A., Canada, Australia, the Netherlands), the victimisation surveys have gradually started to be carried out on a regular basis. In the late 'eighties, the idea was introduced to use these surveys as a means of international comparison in the field of crime. As a result, the International Crime Victimisation Survey (ICVS) has been created and has spread to more and more countries and cities all over the world. Until now, there have been carried out three such surveys (1989, 1992, and 1996), and Poland has participated in all of them. The strategy of the ICVS has been to elaborate a common questionnaire and to leave the field work to each participating country. In Poland, the ICVS has been carried out by the Institute of Justice affiliated to the Ministry of Justice.

In 1989 sweep of the ICVS, the survey was carried out only on a sample of Warsaw dwellers and by means of a telephone interview. Since in Poland, even in Warsaw, the possession of a telephone is far from being common, a random selection of interviewees from a telephone directory produced a very biased sample and this is why the results of the survey were considered unsuitable for further comparisons.

The 1992 survey on the victimisations in 1991 was carried out on a national stratified random sample of about 2000 respondents aged 16 years and over, and the 1996 survey, informing of the victimisations in 1995, on a similar sample of about 4000 respondents. The response rate was 5 and 14 per cent, respectively. All the respondents were personally interviewed at home which made the survey rather expensive. Both of the surveys were carried out under the guidance and supervision of Professor A. Siemaszko who is also the author or reports on their results. The present account of the unrecorded crime in Poland relies heavily on his research papers.

The victimisation surveys, as attempts at measurement of the extent of crime, have some specific deficiency. They rely on the recollections of previous incidents by the victims, and on the victims' understanding of the meaning attached to these incidents. The surveys can cover only a few criminal offences and it can always be debatable if their selection is proper.

For the 13 offences listed (Table 2), three are related to cars and further two to other vehicles, which may seem biased, particularly in countries where the possession of a car is still not quite common. Among the remaining offences there are some against health and personal integrity (assaults), those against property (theft, burglary, robbery), sexual offences (sexual incidents), and economic offences (consumer fraud, corruption). As a whole, the list seems to be fairly comprehensive.

The main tool in the analysis in victimisation surveys are victimisation rates, i.e. percentages of people who became victims of offences under study during the year preceding the survey (Table 3). Most often Poles were victimised by consumer fraud (one in nine in 1991, and one in seven in 1995). Frequent victims were also those of thefts from the car, and car vandalism: experienced them one in ten of the car owners in 1991 and in 1995. All other offences under investigation were committed considerably less frequently. In the case of personal theft in 1991 one in twelve respondents were victimised (in 1995 – one in eighteen), and in the case of other offences the victimisations occurred even less often.

Table 3. One year victimisation rates; results of 1992 and 1996 surveys

| Offences                         | Victimisation rates (%) <sup>*</sup> |      | Multiple vict. rates (%) <sup>**</sup> |      | Non reported off. (%) <sup>***</sup> |      |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------|--|------|--------------------------------------|------|
|                                  | 1991                                 | 1995 | 1991                                   | 1995 | 1991                                 | 1995 |
| Assault/threat                   | 4,2                                  | 3,7  | 31,1                                   | 39,2 | 75,2                                 | 68,8 |
| Robbery                          | 1,7                                  | 1,8  | 14,8                                   | 24,5 | 68,6                                 | 62,5 |
| Burglary with entry              | 2,1                                  | 2,0  | 21,9                                   | 26,6 | 50,7                                 | 45,7 |
| Attempted burglary               | 2,3                                  | 1,8  | 23,8                                   | 37,3 |                                      |      |
| Personal theft                   | 8,1                                  | 5,6  | 12,3                                   | 20,5 | 79,8                                 | 79,8 |
| Car theft                        | 1,4                                  | 1,5  | 0,0                                    | 9,1  | 7,0                                  | 7,2  |
| Theft from the car               | 10,5                                 | 10,1 | 8,3                                    | 23,4 | 46,5                                 | 55,1 |
| Car vandalism                    | 9,5                                  | 9,6  | 19,7                                   | 24,4 | 70,4                                 | 67,2 |
| Motorcycle theft                 | 3,4                                  | 1,6  | 10,2                                   | 0,0  | 10,9                                 | 21,0 |
| Bicycle theft                    | 5,4                                  | 3,4  | 9,7                                    | 8,6  | 53,0                                 | 55,2 |
| Consumer fraud                   | 11,6                                 | 14,2 |  |      |                                      |      |
| Corruption                       | 5,5                                  | 4,8  |  |      |                                      |      |
| Sexual incidents <sup>****</sup> | 3,6                                  | 1,5  | 46,7                                   | 33,5 | 91,6                                 | 88,0 |

\* Per cent of respondents who have been victims of offences specified in the table; in the case of offences related to cars (car theft, theft from the car, car vandalism) the victimisation rates are counted as per cent of car owners.

\*\* Per cent of respondents who have been victims more than once among all persons victimised.

\*\*\* Per cent of offences not reported to the police by the victims.

\*\*\*\* Rape, attempted rape, indecent assault.

The differences between victimisation rates in 1991 and 1995 are striking. With the exception of consumer fraud – there were more victimisations of this kind in 1995 than in 1991 and the difference between the rates was statistically significant. The rates for the majority of other offences remained the same or nearly the same (robbery, burglary with entry, car theft, theft from the car, car vandalism). Substantially lower were the rates related to personal theft, motorcycle theft, bicycle theft, corruption, and sexual incidents, and all the differences in these rates were statistically significant. Also the rates for assault attempted burglary decreased, although the differences in their rates were statistically not significant. The general tendency exhibited by the changes in the victimisation rates between 1991 and 1995 was towards a lower level of crime. Such tendency has not been exhibited by the figures and rates in official criminal statistics (Table 1 and 2).

Despite of these changes the order of victimisation rates when arranged from the highest to the lowest is very similar in 1995 to that of 1991. The first most frequently committed offences (consumer fraud, theft from the car, car vandalism, personal theft, and corruption) were in the same order in 1995 as they were in observed. As a result, Kendall's rank correlation coefficient  $\tau$  (tau) for the victimisation rates in 1991 and in 1995 is very high ( $\tau=0.76$ ).

Some of the victims of crime have been victimised more than once in each year under consideration. How many people of this kind are among the victims is show in Table 3 under the heading "multiple victimisation rates". In 1991, nearly half of the victims of a sexual incident and nearly one third of the victims of an assault were victimised more than once. There were no such respondents among the victims of car theft, only one in twelve among people who had something stolen from their car, one in ten among those whose bicycle or motorcycle was stolen, and one in eight among victims of personal theft.



In 1995, in comparison with 1991, there were fewer people victimised more than once only among victims of a sexual incident, among those who had their bicycle stolen, and among those who had their motorcycle stolen (actually there were no such people in the sample in 1995). In the case of the remaining 8 offences, multiple victimisation occurred more often, sometimes substantially more often, in 1995 than in 1991, which means that crime became more concentrated. In general, if somebody became a victim of almost any offence under investigation, the probability that he/she would become again a victim of the same offence rises enormously. This was much more common in 1995 than in 1991.

It is well known that people, because of various reasons, report to the police only some of the offences committed against them. They tend to report some offences more readily than others. Usually, the low reportability occurs in the case of sexual offences and high – in car theft. To report a sexual offence means to the victim that the consequences of being involved in criminal proceedings must be born, and he/she may not wish to do so. To report the theft of a car is a rule absolutely necessary, otherwise it would be impossible to get it back and/or to claim the insurance. Polish experience corroborates these observations.

In the case of all 10 offences listed (Table 3), in 1995, in comparison with 1991, the tendency to report less often was present in five offences (assault, robbery, burglary, car vandalism, and sexual incidents). There were also insignificant, small changes in three offences (personal theft, car theft, bicycle theft), and only in two offences there was more reporting (theft from the car and motorcycle theft). It seems, therefore, probable that in Poland the confidence in the police efficiency has decreased over these years.

As mentioned before, the changes in the victimisation rates between 1991 and 1995 showed a decrease in crime. In the same period, however, the share of unreported offences tended to increase. The next result of these two tendencies should be, all other factors equal, the decrease in crime recorded by the police. That such a decrease did not occur seems to confirm the earlier suggestion that the changes in the number of offences recorded are related to other factors than the changes in the level of crime.

5. Perception of crime by the public is shaped by many forces. It may be based on personal experience stemming from being a perpetrator, a victim, or a witness of an offence. It may be formed on the basis of the opinions of other people by face-to-face contacts in one's direct environment. It may also be shaped by media, in particular by TV. Usually, all these forces work together and the opinions held by people are an outcome of their interplay.

In the perception of crime in the postcommunist countries, Poland being no exception, special role is played by the media. Until the early 'nineties the coverage of crime in press, in broadcast, and in TV was rare. Crime was expected to disappear, and, therefore, the centrally controlled media did not consider it to be an issue meriting attention. Information on crime was scarce and served mainly to show the efficiency of the police, and the prosecution authorities, as well as, occasionally, the courts.

In the 'nineties, the media freed from direct political control quickly realized that crime was a subject that attracted wide interest. It soon became evident that it was a popular commodity that soled well. As a consequence, the public has become constantly exposed to information on crime. Judging from the content of the media, Poland appears a crime ridden country where lawlessness prevails. The data already presented and those which follow do not support such a belief.

In Poland, public opinion research has had a long tradition. As early as 1956, the first public opinion poll centre was established. In the 'eighties, another institution of this kind was

set up, i.e. the Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS), and in the 'nineties, several more public opinion poll institutions started to operate mostly to satisfy the demand for market research. However, at present a number of these institutions also carry out research on various social problem such as the attitudes towards crime and punishment, opinions on the operation of criminal justice system, prestige of legal professions, etc. The research done by CBOS has for years been conducted on random samples of the adult population of 1100-1200 respondents from across the country.

The CBOS has for years been active in polling public opinion on these subjects and some of the results obtained by the Centre will be discussed below. Firstly, a general problem arises of where people qualify crime among other problems in this country. Then another issue is what the concerns and fears of the respondents themselves are. Later some information will be provided on the estimation of the safety of the country and the place of residence of the respondent. Finally, some attention will be paid to the problem of personal feeling of insecurity due to crime.

**Table 4. Which of the following problems our country is facing do you think are most important?\***

| Problems   | Time the consecutive surveys were carried out |      |          |      |           |      |          |      |          |      |          |      |          |      |
|--|---|------|----------|------|-----------|------|----------|------|----------|------|----------|------|----------|------|
|  | July '92                                      |      | Jan. '93 |      | March '93 |      | Jan. '94 |      | Jan. '95 |      | Feb. '96 |      | Jan. '97 |      |
|  | %   | Rank | %        | Rank | %         | Rank | %        | Rank | %        | Rank | %        | Rank | %        | Rank |
| Unemployment                                       | 66  | 1    | 69       | 1    | 70        | 1    | 65       | 1    | 65       | 1    | 62       | 1    | 60       | 1    |
| Too low wages and too high prices                  | 59  | 2    | 49       | 2    | 52        | 2    | 54       | 2    | 52       | 2    | 54       | 2    | 52       | 2    |
| Crime, mafia activities                            | 22  | 5    | 25       | 5    | 23        | 5    | 28       | 5    | 35       | 4    | 44       | 3    | 42       | 3    |
| Incompetent, irresponsible government              | 43  | 3    | 45       | 3    | 44        | 3    | 30       | 3    | 40       | 3    | 32       | 4    | 31       | 4    |
| Pollution of natural environment                   | 31  | 4    | 29       | 4    | 31        | 4    | 29       | 4    | 28       | 5    | 24       | 5    | 22       | 5    |
| Alcohol or drug abuse                              | 18  | 6    | 12       | 8    | 16        | 6    | 18       | 6    | 17       | 6    | 20       | 6    | 21       | 6    |
| Moral decline of the society                       | 14  | 7,5  | 11       | 9,5  | 12        | 9    | 16       | 8    | 16       | 7,5  | 14       | 7    | 19       | 7    |
| Food shortages, malnourishment                     | 11  | 10   | 20       | 6    | 11        | 10   | 14       | 9    | 16       | 7,5  | 10       | 10   | 17       | 8    |
| Adverse consequences of privatisation              | 15  | 7,5  | 11       | 9,5  | 15        | 7    | 17       | 7    | 9        | 10   | 13       | 8,5  | 11       | 9    |
| Danger of riots or social unrest                   | 14  | 9    | 19       | 7    | 13        | 8    | 13       | 10   | 11       | 9    | 13       | 8,5  | 8        | 10   |
| Danger of conflict with the neighbouring countries | 1   | 12   | 5        | 11,5 | 1         | 11   | 9        | 11   | 6        | 11   | 4        | 12   | 5        | 11   |
| Breakdown of an atomic power station               | 3   | 11   | 5        | 11,5 | 0         | 12   | 3        | 12   | 4        | 12   | 5        | 11   | 3        | 12   |

\* The respondents were asked to name not more than three problems.

Since 1992, in a series of surveys carried out by the CBOS every year, the respondents were asked to choose three problems from a list of 12 to consider as most important among those Poland was facing (Table 4). The problems on the list were of a very different character, for example, unemployment, moral decline of the society, malnourishment, danger of social unrest. The results collected over a period of four and half years showed, despite of the rapid transformation of the country, surprising consistency (Kendall's coefficient of concordance  $W=0.947$ ). Invariably, the five most often indicated items were: unemployment; "too low wages and too high prices"; crime; poor government; and pollution of natural environment. Also, the least often chosen items were the same: danger of conflict with the neighbouring countries, and breakdown of an atomic power station. Crime rose from

the fifth position in 1992-1994, to the fourth place in 1995, and to the third place in 1996-1997, only after unemployment and inadequate wages. In July 1992, crime was indicated as one of the three most important problems by 22 per cent and in January 1997 by 42 per cent of the respondents. Crime tended to be indicated more often by elderly people (65 years of age), living in towns and cities, better educated, more affluent, in other words by people who may have felt to be a more likely target of a criminal attack.

I conducted a poll in February 1998; all these problems were addressed in a somewhat different way. The respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which the country is threatened by each of the five problems most often mentioned in the past. In such formulation, crime advanced to the first position: 68 per cent of respondents considered crime to be a very serious threat to the country, and 23 per cent thought it is a serious threat. Unemployment and incompetent government were regarded as a very serious or serious threat by 51 per cent and 27 per cent, and by 43 and 25 per cent, respectively. The conclusion is that the concern over crime, as a phenomenon endangering Poland, seems to be on the rise.

In a separate question, the respondents were asked about the problems they feared personally (Table 5). The CBOS research allows this matter to be analysed from 1994, i.e. three years back. Similarly, the respondents were required to select three main sources of their worry or fear from a list of 11 items. The consistency of the answers over the years was also significant, although it seems not to have been so pronounced (Kendall's coefficient of concordance  $W=0.875$ ). People worried mostly about their own health, about crime, poverty and unemployment. Worry over intolerance, humiliation, or decline in own firm or farm, were expressed four to ten times less often. In January 1994, the respondents located the fear of crime on a relatively far sixth position. In January 1995, in February 1996, and in January 1997, crime was placed on the fourth, first, and second positions, respectively. In 1994, crime was indicated as one of the three main sources of worry by 32 per cent, two years later by 47 per cent, but in 1997 by 43 per cent of the respondents, that is less than a year earlier. Most worried about crime were the same categories of respondents as those who considered crime as a threat to the country. There was, however, one exception: the fear of crime was mostly spread among the youngest respondents, aged 24 or under 24 years. This seems to be rational since most crime is probably committed by and against young adult people.

In the February 1998 poll, the way the questions were asked was changed. The respondents were required to tell whether they worry about 1) their own health or that of his/hers close relatives; 2) lower standard of living of the family; 3) the respondent or his/hers family becoming victim of crime; 4) becoming unemployed; 5) possible trouble with children. The last percentage was calculated for people with children. The "yes" answers were mentioned by: 66, 58, 53, 43, and 18 per cent of the respondents, respectively. It looks as if the fear of crime in 1998 has been removed further down the list of personal fears. Since the formulation of the question has been changed this can only be a probable conclusion.

Table 5. Which of the following problems are for you the main sources of worry and/or fear?\*

| Main source of worry and/or fear         | Time the consecutive surveys were carried out |      |          |      |          |      |          |      |
|--|---|------|----------|------|----------|------|----------|------|
|  | Jan. '94                                      |      | Jan. '95 |      | Feb. '96 |      | Jan. '97 |      |
|  | %   | Rank | %        | Rank | %        | Rank | %        | Rank |
| Deterioration of health                  | 43  | 2    | 46       | 2    | 40       | 2,5  | 48       | 1    |
| Crime                                    | 32  | 6    | 34       | 4    | 47       | 1    | 43       | 2    |
| Poverty, inadequate means of subsistence | 45  | 1    | 51       | 1    | 40       | 2,5  | 40       | 3    |
| Becoming unemployed                      | 30  | 7    | 41       | 3    | 37       | 5    | 37       | 4    |
| Costs of health care                     | 36  | 5    | 33       | 5,5  | 39       | 4    | 35       | 5    |
| Poor prospects for children              | 37  | 4    | 33       | 5,5  | 33       | 6    | 31       | 6    |
| Lowering standard of living              | 38  | 3    | 30       | 7    | 31       | 7    | 27       | 7    |
| Intolerance                              | 11  | 8    | 9        | 8    | 12       | 8    | 10       | 8    |
| Family conflicts                         | 6   | 10   | 7        | 9    | 5        | 10,5 | 8        | 9    |
| Loss of respect, humiliation             | 8   | 9    | 6        | 10,5 | 5        | 10,5 | 7        | 10   |
| Decline of own firm (farm)               | 5   | 11   | 6        | 10,5 | 6        | 9    | 5        | 11   |

\* The respondents were asked to name not more than three sources.

There is also series of CBOS research with another approach to the same problem. What was similar in these two approaches was an attempt to make an analysis on a general level (the country) and on a specific level (immediate environment of the respondent). What was different was the way the questions were asked. The first question was: "Do you think Poland is a country where one lives safely?" Happily such a question was asked not only in the "nineties, but also in 1987, i.e. well before the beginning of the transformation. There is a striking difference in answers to this question in 1987 and in the 'nineties. In 1987, Poland was considered to be a safe place by 74 per cent of the respondents, in the years 1993-1998 by only 19-24 per cent. One point has to be stressed: this question was not asked in the research carried out in the years 1988-1992; therefore, the exact moment this dramatic change in opinion occurred is not known. It is not even clear whether it was a gradual or a rapid change. Most probably, the opinion changed in 1990 or gradually through the years 1990-1992. It is also interesting to note that since 1995 nearly all people have had a firm opinion on this subject: there were very few answers "it is hard to say". In 1998, the picture of Poland as a crime-ridden country has been uniformly spread over all categories of people: among men and women, those more and less educated, affluent and poor, those living in cities, towns or villages.

Table 6. Do you think Poland is a country where one lives safely?

| Answer            | Time the consecutive surveys were carried out |          |           |           |           |           |
|-------------------|---|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                   | March '87                                     | Nov. '93 | April '95 | April '96 | April '97 | March '98 |
|                   | %   | %        | %         | %         | %         | %         |
| Yes               | 74  | 26       | 19        | 21        | 24        | 22        |
| No                | 22  | 67       | 79        | 77        | 75        | 76        |
| It is hard to say | 4   | 7        | 2         | 2         | 1         | 2         |

The other question was: "It is correct to describe the place where you live (part of town, neighbourhood, village) as being safe and quiet?" Also, nearly all people felt they were able to provide an answer to this question. This seems reasonable since

the opinion expressed in the answer could easily be based on everyday observation and information obtained from people known personally.

The great majority of respondents believed they lived in a "safe and quiet" place: 80 per cent thought so in 1987. In the years 1993-1998, the percentage of such people became smaller, but – slowly and steadily grew, from 67 in 1993 to 72 in 1997-1998 (Table 7). Village dwellers described their places as being safe and quiet much more often than people living in towns and cities (84 per cent against 56-76 per cent).

**Table 7. Is it correct to describe the place where you live (part of the town, neighbourhood, village) as being safe and quiet?**

| Answer            | Time the consecutive surveys were carried out |          |           |           |           |           |
|-------------------|---|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                   | March '87                                     | Nov. '93 | April '95 | April '96 | April '97 | March '98 |
|                   | %   | %        | %         | %         | %         | %         |
| Yes               | 80  | 67       | 69        | 70        | 72        | 72        |
| No                | 17  | 30       | 29        | 29        | 26        | 26        |
| It is hard to say | 3   | 3        | 2         | 1         | 2         | 2         |

A puzzling question arises when one looks at the responses in table 6 and 7 jointly. According to 76 per cent of the respondents, Poland is an unsafe country, but 72 per cent live in a safe neighbourhood, which does not seem quite consistent. As expected, nearly all (95 per cent) describing their neighbourhood as unsafe also hold that Poland was unsafe, but the same was true for 70 per cent of people living in "safe and quiet" places. The latter people must have formed their opinion on the safety of the country not on the basis of the experience they had in their own neighbourhood. The media providing a wide variety of news on crime seem to have made a major contribution to in still this opinion in the public.

Finally, "Are people in Poland afraid of becoming victimised by crime?" The CBOS research in this mater covers only the last two years (Table 8), and shows that this opinion is expressed by the majority of people: 57 per cent in April 1996 and 52 per cent in March 1998. The decrease is small but the downward trend is worthy noting since the difference is statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 6,78$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Women (rather than men), city and town dwellers (rather than those living in rural communities), and people better educated (rather than those less educated) are more afraid of becoming victims of crime.

**Table 8. Are you afraid to become a victim of a crime?**

| Answer                   | Time the consecutive surveys were carried out |           |           |
|--------------------------|---|-----------|-----------|
|                          | April '96                                     | April '97 | March '98 |
|                          | %   | %         | %         |
| Not at all               | 7   | 7         | 8         |
| Not really               | 23  | 30        | 27        |
| I am afraid but not much | 50  | 46        | 47        |
| I am very much afraid    | 17  | 15        | 15        |
| It is hard to say        | 3   | 2         | 3         |

In general, the fears of becoming victimised by crime seem to be very much exaggerated compared with the actual victimisation rates (Table 3). Although these rates are only true for one year, the five-years rates are not much higher. The highest victimisation

rates were found for consumer fraud. It is, however, unlikely that people who admit fearing to become victimised by crime have this offence in mind. Relatively higher victimisation rates have also been found for thefts from the car and car vandalism, but car owners are only among members of about half of the households.

### Conclusions

In conclusion, according to police statistics, the level of crime recorded in the 'nineties has been nearly twice as high as that in the 'seventies and 'eighties. During the 'nineties, there was a further modest rise in these rates and the number of offences recorded; at the same time, crime seemed to be more serious. The clearance rates in cases where the suspect was not known at the moment of reporting the offence were very low. Crime is at present a threat to the society mainly because of its more and more violent character, because of the spread of committing economic offences, and because of the growing organized crime activity.

The results of victimisation surveys indicate that between 1991 and 1995 crime tended to stay constant or to decrease only with the exception of economic offences. There was a clear tendency towards concentration of crime indicated by the rise in multiple victimisation. The victims of most offences did not report them to the police.

Public opinion surveys show that the great majority of people think they live in a safe neighbourhood. At the same time, people regarded Poland as being unsafe place to live, they are afraid of becoming victims of a crime, and tend to consider crime as a more and more pressing issue in the country. Crime is also a source of personal worry for the majority of people. These beliefs seem to be, to a large extent, shaped by the media and are not substantiated by the figures in criminal statistics and by the results of the victimisation surveys.



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### ***Nusikalstamumas Lenkijoje dešimtajame dešimtmetyje***

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### **SANTRAUKA**

*Pranešime apžvelgiamas nusikalstamumas Lenkijoje dešimtajame dešimtmetyje. Ši problema nagrinėjama trimis skirtingais, bet tarpusavyje susijusiais aspektais: policijos užregistruoti nusikaltimai, neužregistruoti nusikaltimai ir visuomenės požiūris į nusikalstamumą. Aptariamos nusikaltimų pagal dažnumą rūšys ir nusikalstamumo pokyčiai pereinamoju laikotarpiu (smurtinių, ekonominių ir organizuotų nusikaltimų daugėjimas). Kiekvienu atveju pateikiama informacija apie prieinamus duomenis ir tų duomenų rinkimo metodologiniai skirtumai komunistinėje ir postkomunistinėje sistemose. Šie skirtumai svarbūs, nes jų nežinant galima neteisingai interpretuoti nusikalstamumo tendencijas. Pranešime taip pat nagrinėjamas žiniasklaidos vaidmuo informuojant visuomenę apie nusikalstamumą ir saugumą. Pateikiami ir daugelio viešosios nuomonės apie nusikalstamumą ir saugumo svarbą apklausų rezultatai.*

