

FactCheck Q A: is violent crime getting worse in Victoria and do people feel less safe than ever?

Written by Stuart Ross, Director and Senior Researcher, Melbourne Criminological Research and Evaluation, University of Melbourne



Energy and Environment Minister Josh Frydenberg speaking on Q&A. ABC

The Conversation fact-checks claims made on Q&A, broadcast Mondays on the ABC at 9:35pm. Thank you to everyone who sent us quotes for checking via [Twitter](#) using hashtags #FactCheck and #QandA, on

[Facebook](#)

or by

[email](#)

.

Excerpt from Q&A, February 6, 2017. Watch from 1:46.

I don't think Victorians have ever felt as unsafe as they do now. I think people are worried about home invasions, carjackings. The numbers tell the story. Burglaries are up 21% year on year in Victoria. Assaults are up 11%. Murders are up 9%. – **Energy and Environment Minister Josh Frydenberg, [speaking on Q&A](#), February 6, 2017.**

Following a question on ABC TV's Q&A program, Josh Frydenberg – who holds the inner Melbourne seat of Kooyong – said he thought people in his home state feel more unsafe than ever and that burglaries, assaults and murders were up year-on-year in that state.

Is that right?

Checking the source

When asked for sources to support his statement, a spokesman for the minister referred The Conversation to the following table from Victoria's [Crime Statistics Agency](#), which processes, analyses and publishes the state's crime statistics independently of Victoria Police. These figures cover crimes recorded by police:

FactCheck Q A: is violent crime getting worse in Victoria and do people feel less safe than ever?

Written by Stuart Ross, Director and Senior Researcher, Melbourne Criminological Research and Evaluation, University of Melbourne

	Oct 2013 - Sept 2014	Oct 2014 - Sept 2015	Oct 2015 - Sept 2016	% change Sept 2015 - Sept 2016	Significance trend test over 24 months
A20 Assault and related offences	37,470	37,974	42,754	12.6%	UP
A50 Robbery	2,541	2,522	3,063	21.5%	UP
A80 Dangerous and negligent acts endangering people	4,263	4,617	5,564	20.5%	UP
B30 Burglary/Break and enter	45,806	47,678	54,219	13.7%	UP
B40 Theft	149,154	158,855	186,636	17.5%	UP
C30 Drug use and possession	19,273	22,547	23,788	5.4%	UP
D20 Disorderly and offensive conduct	21,090	18,865	16,545	-12.3%	DOWN
D30 Public nuisance offences	2,617	2,825	3,442	21.8%	UP
E10 Justice procedures	6,416	7,808	13,689	75.3%	UP
E20 Breaches of orders	42,296	51,496	58,528	13.7%	UP
F10 Regulatory driving offences	28	30	14	-53.3%	DOWN
F20 Transport regulation offences	501	463	674	45.6%	UP
F30 Other government	997	665	523	-21.4%	DOWN

Two key sources for crime stats

There are two main sources against which Frydenberg's crime stats can be checked.

The first is the [Crime Statistics Agency in Victoria](#) (Frydenberg's source). These figures reflect crimes recorded by police.

But evidence shows that [not all Australians](#) who are victims of a crime report it to police, which means those figures are not showing the full picture. It depends on the crime; the reporting rate for break-ins is about 77%, and it's about 93% for motor vehicle theft. But the reporting rate for robbery is about 52%, physical assault is at about 55% and it's as low as 30% for sexual assault).

To get a better sense of true crime rates, a second, more reliable, measure of crime in the community is the [crime victimisation survey](#) conducted each year by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Since 2008, these surveys ask a [large sample](#) of the population whether they have experienced certain personal and household crimes in the last 12 months.

What do the stats on crimes recorded by police show?

The [Crime Statistics Agency data](#) that the minister's office cited show that between September 2015 and September 2016:

- Burglary/break and enter offences were up 13.7% (not 21%, as Frydenberg said on Q&A; if he had said robberies, 21% would have been correct).

FactCheck Q A: is violent crime getting worse in Victoria and do people feel less safe than ever?

Written by Stuart Ross, Director and Senior Researcher, Melbourne Criminological Research and Evaluation, University of Melbourne

- Assault and related offences were up 12.6% (slightly more than the 11% Frydenberg said on the show)
- [The number of murders](#) went from 56 to 61, an increase of 8.9% (matching Frydenberg's figure of 9%)
- The overall offence rate increased by 9.4%.

Over the past five years, the offence rate per 100,000 people in Victoria has has an average annual increase of 5.4%.

So even though Frydenberg got some figures wrong, his broader point – that crime is getting worse in Victoria – is well supported by this data set. And he did quote the Crime Statistics Agency's figure for murder correctly on Q&A.

But it's possible these figures reflect the fact that people are increasingly likely to report crimes to the police.

What does the Crime Victimization Survey show?

But what's a better way to get a sense of whether Victorians are more or less likely to be a victim of crime than before? That was the point Q&A viewer Paula Maud made in her [tweet](#) requesting a FactCheck – and it's a good point.

That's where looking at the ABS crime victimisation survey figure can help us get a more accurate picture.

The [crime victimisation rate](#) gives us an indication of the total number of victims of a crime in each state and territory, or Australia-wide, expressed as a percentage of that population.

For example, if Victoria had a robbery victimisation rate of 0.3% in 2015-16, it means that three Victorians aged 15 and above in every 1000 ([excluding](#) members of the defence forces and overseas residents in Australia) reported that they were victims of robbery in that 12 month period.

FactCheck Q A: is violent crime getting worse in Victoria and do people feel less safe than ever?

Written by Stuart Ross, Director and Senior Researcher, Melbourne Criminological Research and Evaluation, University of Melbourne

The charts below show how the victimisation rate has changed for various crime categories between 2008 and 2016.

The ABS' [crime victimisation survey](#) calls burglaries “break-ins” (meaning unlawful entry of a dwelling with intent to steal something). It covers robberies (meaning a theft in combination with a threatened or actual assault) as well.

The Crime Victimization Survey doesn't report on murder, but data from the [National Homicide Monitoring Program](#) shows that the murder rate in Victoria, as in Australia generally, has declined by about a third since 1990. And the latest ABS [Victims of Homicide](#) data (which goes up to 2015) show the murder rate for Victoria has declined:

Is crime in Victoria rising in the longer term?

Between 2008 and 2016, most crime rates in Victoria decreased, the crime victimisation surveys show. (Sexual assault and domestic violence rates have gone up, which may reflect changing social attitudes and definitions around these crimes).

This general fall in the level of crime started [in the early 2000s](#) and is apparent in all Australian states except Western Australia, the crime victimisation survey shows. It's also apparent in the United States, the United Kingdom and most European countries.

FactCheck Q A: is violent crime getting worse in Victoria and do people feel less safe than ever?

Written by Stuart Ross, Director and Senior Researcher, Melbourne Criminological Research and Evaluation, University of Melbourne

There have been a variety of explanations proposed for the “[great crime decline](#)”, none of them entirely satisfactory. But what is undeniable is that the level of crime in developed countries is now significantly lower than it was at the end of the 20th century.

Have Victorians’ ever felt as unsafe as they do now?

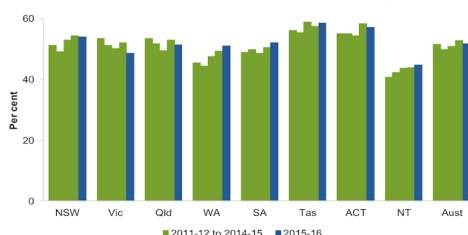
As [noted](#) in previous crime stats FactCheck:

Public perceptions of crime and justice are commonly out of kilter with the facts. [Surveys](#) conducted by the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research show that most people think crime is increasing when it is not.

That said, the [2015 VicHealth Indicators survey](#) showed that the proportion of Victorians who reported feeling safe when walking alone after dark was 55.1%. That was down from 2011 when 59.3% said they felt safe, but not significantly different to the level when the same question was asked in 2007.

The 2017 [Report on Government Services](#) on justice reported a steady fall in the proportion of Victorians who said they felt safe walking in their neighbourhood after dark. Interestingly, over the five-year period shown in the chart below, that change in feeling less safe walking down the street in Victoria wasn’t reported by people in most other states or territories.

Figure 6.17 Perceptions of safety in public places during the night^a
(a) Proportion who felt ‘safe’ or ‘very safe’ walking locally



Perceptions of safety in public places during the night. [Report on Government Services, Volume C: Justice](#)

The [IPSOS Issues Monitor survey](#) for December 2016 showed that crime was the most highly ranked issue for Victorians, with 41% selecting it as one of the three most important issues facing their state, up from 28% for most of 2014 and 2015. However, the current level of concern about crime in Victoria is about the same as it was in 2010.

FactCheck Q A: is violent crime getting worse in Victoria and do people feel less safe than ever?

Written by Stuart Ross, Director and Senior Researcher, Melbourne Criminological Research and Evaluation, University of Melbourne

Broadly speaking, it does appear that Victorians' concerns about crime have increased in recent years.

Verdict

Josh Frydenberg accurately quoted one set of official statistics on murder on Q&A, and was close to the mark (actually slightly underquoting) the figures on assault and related offences. However, as his office readily acknowledged, he got it wrong on the increase in burglaries.

Is his broader point that crime is worsening in Victoria correct? According to figures based on police records, yes. But we also know that many crimes never get reported to police, which means we're better off looking at another, more reliable data set – the ABS' annual crime victimisation survey.

That survey shows that between 2015 and 2016, the victimisation rate for break-in and physical assault rose, and stayed the same for robbery. Over the longer term, (between 2008 and 2016) most crime rates in Victoria decreased and this general fall is apparent in all Australian states except Western Australia.

A number of different sources show that Victorians are feeling more concerned about crime and safety in recent years. We don't have enough comparable data to say if Victorians have ever felt as unsafe as they do now. – **Stuart Ross**

Review

This analysis is thorough and the author has relied on a variety of data sets to reach evidence-based conclusions.

One issue worth noting is the difference between public perceptions of crime versus the reality of crime that is occurring. The media focus on crime is one culprit in shaping our perceptions of reality. It is also worthy to note that when politicians speak of crime issues relevant to the public, they are often referencing recent events rather than the long term trend. – **Terry Goldsworthy**

FactCheck Q A: is violent crime getting worse in Victoria and do people feel less safe than ever?

Written by Stuart Ross, Director and Senior Researcher, Melbourne Criminological Research and Evaluation, University of Melbourne

Have you ever seen a “fact” worth checking? The Conversation’s FactCheck asks academic experts to test claims and see how true they are. We then ask a second academic to review an anonymous copy of the article. You can request a check at checkit@theconversation.edu.au. Please include the statement you would like us to check, the date it was made, and a link if possible.

Stuart Ross has done consulting work for the Victorian Department of Justice in the past. He has previously received funding from the ARC.

Terry Goldsworthy does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond the academic appointment above.

Authors: Stuart Ross, Director and Senior Researcher, Melbourne Criminological Research and Evaluation, University of Melbourne

Read more <http://theconversation.com/factcheck-ganda-is-violent-crime-getting-worse-in-victoria-and-do-people-feel-less-safe-than-ever-72649>