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### **Abstract**

Rahn and Transue examine the performance of the new fear of crime and crime prevention questions. The authors find that: (1) Fear of crime has different origins depending on whether the respondent is engaged in their community. For socially isolated individuals, fear of crime is heavily based on indirect and mass mediated information. On the other hand, those who are engaged in the community draw more heavily on community-based information -- as indexed by "length of residence" -- than those who are not engaged. (2) Fear of crime is an important predictor of respondents' crime prevention attitudes. It also shapes respondents' evaluations of illegal immigrants, but has no effect in predicting affect toward other social groups. (3) High fear of crime erodes beliefs about government responsiveness, but does not affect trust in government. (4) Finally, fear of crime can moderate the impact of other variables. Specifically, fear of crime can motivate information acquisition and participation, but only if it is combined with knowledge about politics and educational resources. Absent these, the main effect of fear of crime is to strongly discourage cognitive engagement and behavioral involvement in politics.

# **The Political Significance of Fear of Crime**

A Report to the NES Board  
by

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Abstract

In order to assess the role of fear of crime in Americans' political opinions and candidate attitudes, the NES pilot planning committee designed a new fear of crime question. In this report, we examine the origins of fear of crime and its direct and indirect effects on political opinions and evaluations. We find that fear of crime has different origins depending on whether one is engaged or not in one's community. For socially isolated individuals, fear of crime is heavily based on indirect and mass-mediated information. We find that fear of crime is an important additional predictor of people's crime prevention attitudes and that it shapes evaluations of illegal immigrants, but no other social group. We also show that fear of crime erodes beliefs about government responsiveness, but does not affect trust in government. Finally, we consider whether fear of crime prompts people to seek out information about political candidates and whether it stimulates political participation. We find that fear can motivate information acquisition and participation, but only if it is combined with knowledge about politics or educational resources. Absent these, its main effect is to strongly discourage cognitive engagement and behavioral involvement in politics.

Despite steady, even declining rates of violent crime in major cities (except in our fair city, where the murder rate reached record-high levels in 1995)<sup>1</sup>, the public remains concerned about crime. Crime played a major role in the 1994 elections to the advantage of many Republicans, the political party linked in the public's mind to tough law and order stances in spite of Clinton's highly touted support for the death penalty. In a Times Mirror Survey in December of 1994, 78% of respondents said that reducing crime should be a "top priority" for the President and the new Congress, beating out the budget deficit (66%), welfare reform (65%), and jobs (64%).

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<sup>1</sup> There are two ways of measuring the extent of crime, the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the National Crime Survey (NCS), conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics within the Department of Justice. Reports in the media of the "crime rate" usually rely on the UCR. Both ways of assessing the prevalence of crime have their own set of biases (Maier 1995). The UCR rely on crimes "known to the police," and therefore, are subject to reporting biases, both on the part of victims and the police. The NCS, on the other hand, is a survey of people, and therefore, is vulnerable to both respondent and sampling problems. Most troubling for the NCS as a measure of crime victimization is that young black men, the most victim-prone group in the population, are severely underrepresented (Skogun 1990).

People's concern about crime may stem from several sources: media agenda-setting, projection of negative feelings due to other sources onto criminals and the criminal justice system (Gaubatz 1995), the big jump in juvenile violent crime that occurred in the 1980s, and the increasingly violent nature of property crimes. Whether concern about crime can be attributed to a heightened real fear of crime, due, perhaps, to new types of crime (drive-by shootings, e.g.) is debatable. The General Social Survey, for example, has asked a question about whether respondents feel afraid to walk alone at night within a mile of their homes. This question has shown very little change over the GSS series (Warr 1995). In 1974, 41% said they were afraid to walk alone in places near their home; in 1994, 47% reported being afraid.<sup>2</sup> Public concern about, and individual fear of crime thus seem to be distinct, but perhaps related, phenomena.

In order to assess the role of crime in citizens' political attitudes and evaluations, the 1995 NES Pilot Planning Committee designed a new fear of crime question and a new question about crime prevention. The pilot also included a new question about the federal government's efforts to reduce crime, but this question appeared on a different form than the other two questions, so we are unable to use it for analytic purposes. Our objective in this report is to probe the fear of crime question for its political significance. We accomplish this by asking and answering three questions: Who is afraid of crime? What is the direct role of fear of crime in shaping attitudes, social group evaluations, and support for the political system? Does fear of crime moderate the impact of other variables? This last question we dub the "Rabinowitz hypothesis" in honor of George Rabinowitz, a member of the Pilot Planning Committee, who initially posed this question.

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<sup>2</sup> This question, however, may understate people's real amount of fear of crime. People always feel safer in familiar contexts. Perhaps fear of crime has increased in unfamiliar settings.

## Who is Afraid of Crime?

Fear of crime is different from concern about crime. The former is usually assessed with questions that ask people to report their own levels of fear of victimization, such as the GSS question mentioned above. The origins of fear of crime have been extensively studied by sociologists. Fear of crime appears to have its basis in both actual and perceived risks of victimization; it thus has some foundation in the real world. Perceived risk of crime is related to objective risk, as measured by crime rates, and actual crime victimization (especially robbery, Liska and Warner 1991), as well as regional variables, and perceived condition of one's surrounding, or "incivility." Ferraro (1995) argues that these patterns can be explained by a judgment process in which people use contextual cues to derive an estimate of the likelihood that they may become a crime victim. Indicators of incivility, such as broken windows and litter, help people draw inferences about the safety of their environment.

Fear of crime, then, is driven by perceived risk. However, even controlling for perceived risk, certain social groups manifest fear of crime over and above what can be accounted for by risk perceptions. Women, young people, and minorities all displayed more fear than can be accounted for by their cognitive assessments of risk (Ferraro 1995). In addition to affecting fear, perceived risk also motivates "constrained behaviors," such as putting more locks on one's door, buying a firearm, avoiding unsafe areas at night, and learning self-defense. Interestingly, according to Ferraro's (1995) latent variable analysis, these protective measures actually heighten one's sense of fear rather than reducing it.<sup>3</sup> Fear of crime also motivates residential migration (Liska and Bellair 1995), and it corrodes faith in human nature, independently of actual crime victimization and other personal experiences that diminish beliefs in the general

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<sup>3</sup> See also Liska, Sanchirico and Reed (1988). They find a reciprocal relationship between fear and constrained behavior; fear produces constrained behavior which in turn produces more fear. Ferraro (1995) tests for a reciprocal path in his data, but finds that only the behavior to fear link is significant.

trustworthiness of people (Brehm and Rahn 1996). Fear of crime thus has important social consequences. We attempt to assess its political significance in the next two sections of this report.

The question developed by the pilot planning committee, a modification of a question used by Dobb and MacDonald (1979) to measure fear of crime, is as follows: "How afraid are you that a member of your family, or a close friend, or you yourself might be the victim of an assault during the coming year? Would you say that you are very afraid, somewhat afraid, a little bit afraid, or not afraid?" This question was put to half of the pilot respondents, so the number of cases we have available for analysis is rather limited. Of those asked the question, 41% report feeling very afraid or somewhat afraid, close to the 47% in the 1994 GSS survey who reported being afraid to walk alone at night within a mile of their homes.<sup>4</sup>

We initially investigated the role of demographic and ecological variables in shaping feelings of fear. We regressed the fear question on race, age, sex, education and education squared,<sup>5</sup> whether the respondent had children, a dummy variable for urban location (central city vs. other), and several regional and state dummy variables, this latter set to crudely capture "objective risk" of crime victimization. Of the geographic variables, only dummy variables for Texas and California showed any significant explanatory power, so we dropped the other contextual variables from our final equation. In Table 1, we see that the performance of these variables is rather modest. Moderate education, and residence in a central city or in Texas or

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<sup>4</sup> For a critique of the GSS and related questions as measures of fear of crime see Ferraro (1995). His book is the most recent and, in our view, most careful examination of the origins of fear of crime. We wish we had known about it at the time the NES question was drafted. In light of Ferraro's analysis, the NES fear of crime question is probably better than the GSS question because it asks about a specific crime and does not limit the location or time of day. However, assault is not a very common crime, and in Ferraro's analysis people report less fear of assault than of other types of crime, such as robbery.

<sup>5</sup> A crosstabulation of education and fear of crime revealed a curvilinear relationship. Those in the middle range of educational attainment were more fearful than those people at either end of the education distribution.



California shape fear, but the other coefficients do not approach statistical significance. The signs on three of the demographic variables, sex, age, and race, are consistent with previous research on fear of crime; that is, the young, women, and nonwhites are more likely to be fearful of crime once objective and perceived risk are controlled (Ferraro 1995).

--Table 1 here--

We next consider two different types of explanations for the origins of fear of crime, "social connectedness" and mass media "cultivation." Social connectedness, or ties to a community, as indicated by length of residence, participation in community organizations, and marriage, among other things, has been linked to voting turnout (Teixeira 1992).<sup>6</sup> Ties to the community can also provide people with information about that community and its inhabitants, information that can help individuals form estimates of crime risk.

Another source of information about the world comes from, of course, the mass media. Gerbner and his colleagues have suggested that television "cultivates" in viewers a view of the world as a mean and scary place (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli 1980). While not without critics (see, e.g., Dobb and MacDonald 1979; Hirsch 1980), the cultivation hypothesis is a popular one in the media effects literature.

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<sup>6</sup> We also found fear of crime to be related to voting turnout. 63% of those low in fear of crime reported voting in both the 1992 and 1994 elections while 37% of those high in fear reported voting in both elections. The main effects for fear persist despite controls for social connectedness and other variables. See further, table 9 and its discussion.

We estimated two different models predicting fear of crime. The social connectedness model uses the following variables, in addition to our baseline model: marital status, frequency of church attendance, and length of time in community. Table 2 shows that these variables do add to our ability to explain fear of crime. There is an interesting pattern in the data. More frequent churchgoers experience less fear of crime than irregular or nonattenders, although this effect is not statistically significant. But the longer people have lived in a community, the more fear they have. We speculate that longer experience with a given community may give residents a larger storehouse of memories of past crimes. Additionally, to the extent that the incidence of crime has increased if one takes a long-term view,<sup>7</sup> people who have lived in a single community for many years have seen the same social environment become more dangerous. Note that the time-in-the-community effect cannot be attributed to the fact that long-term residents are older, for age is controlled in the model, and, as in Table 1, has a negatively-signed coefficient. Older people are less, not more, afraid of crime.

--Table 2 here--

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<sup>7</sup> For example, if one compares conditions prevailing before the explosion of crime in the 60s and 70s to conditions prevailing after this jump. See Ferraro 1995.

The media model uses three questions on the pilot that seemed promising for pursuing cultivation effects. One asked respondents how much attention they paid to news stories about crime, another asked how often they watched NYPD Blue, a top ten television drama about crime and police in New York City, and a third question asked about Primetime Live, a popular newsmagazine show.<sup>8</sup> To ensure that we have isolated the impact of content-specific attention or exposure on fear of crime, we include a variable that measures respondents' knowledge of TV facts (from the TV quiz on the pilot) and a variable measuring the number of days in the past week respondents watched TV news in order to capture exposure to news generally. Adding these media-related variables to our fear equation did improve matters, as displayed in Table 2. The three content-specific media variables have the correct sign. One, attention to crime news, is highly significant and of substantively important magnitude. The two more general media variables (knowledge and general news exposure) are not statistically significant and are trivial in magnitude.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, content-based measures of TV viewing seem to be more useful than more general exposure or reception variables, at least for explaining this particular orientation.

--Table 3 here--

We next consider the interaction between social connectedness and media consumption. Our intuition is that people who are relatively socially isolated, as indicated by less frequent involvement in community life, would be most sensitive to the media's view of the world. People who are engaged in their communities, however, have a base of real (and we

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<sup>8</sup> Obviously, the causal direction is up for grabs. Do people become more frightened because they watch a lot of news about crime? Or do they pay attention to crime stories because they are frightened? For the purposes of this report, we treat the relationship as one in which viewing causes emotional response, consistent with the work on the "cultivation hypothesis" (see Gerbner et al. 1980), but recognize the plausibility of the alternative.

<sup>9</sup> In order to ensure that we are capturing the effects of domain-specific viewing, we ran another equation in which we also included attention to news about the economy and attention to news about the environment. Neither of these variables was statistically significant ( $.30 < p < .76$ ) and each had a substantively small coefficient in comparison to the crime news variable.

would suspect, mostly positive) experience upon which to build their impressions about what the world is like. Thus our expectation is that the media variables will be more important for those who are not socially connected.

We test this intuition by running separate regressions for high and low church attendance groups. We use attention to crime news from the media model and the length of time in the community variable from the social connectedness model as independent variables, in addition to the baseline variables.

Column 1 of Table 4 displays the results of this analysis for frequent church attenders. We see here that attention to crime news has no substantive import and is not statistically significant. Column 2 of Table 4 presents the same equation for less frequent church attenders; this model produces results more in line with the media model presented earlier. Attention to news stories about crime strongly and significantly increases fear of crime.<sup>10</sup> A crosstabulation of church attendance and attention to crime news shows that many of the high church attenders also report paying "A lot" of attention to news on crime.<sup>11</sup> Thus it appears that the difference lies not in exposure to messages about crime from the mass media, but that the people who attend church do not use this information in forming assessments of their risk and fear of victimization. Interestingly, the length of time in the community remains positive in both equations, but is somewhat stronger for the frequent church attenders. This suggests that those who are engaged in the community draw more heavily on community-based information (as indexed by length of residence) than those who are not engaged. While the sign on the coefficient indicates that those who have lived in a community a long time have more fear, we suspect that

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<sup>10</sup> The difference between the two groups in the attention to crime news coefficients is statistically significant ( $p < .05$ , two-tailed).

<sup>11</sup> The attention variable is a 3-point scale ranging from "not much attention" through "some attention" to "a lot." The simple correlation between frequency of church attendance and attention to crime news is positive,  $r = .043$ , but it is not significant.

the real effect of community residence is to increase one's accuracy about the real level of crime and how much it has changed, not to increase or decrease one's level of fear per se. In some communities, people should be afraid. In other communities, more accurate information should lead to less fear.

Those who are not engaged, on the other hand, draw on more indirect information, such as images on television or the larger context, such as living in an urban area or a high crime state (notice that the signs on the sex, urban and California dummies are negative for frequent church attenders, but strongly and significantly positive for less frequent attenders). In the absence of social connections, mass media exposure appears to heighten the fear of more isolated citizens. Education, however, seems to have similar effects on both groups. Fear is highest among those in the middle of the education distribution.

--Table 4 here--

### **Fear of Crime and Political Orientations and Evaluations**

The public's concern over and fear of crime have long been fodder for the political consultant's trade. From Nixon's Law and Order campaign to Willie Horton, politicians have sought to use people's feelings about crime to political advantage, believing that such sentiments are powerful. To what extent do the data support this commonsensical assumption? We begin by examining the impact of fear of crime on people's beliefs about the best way to combat crime. We regressed the new pilot question about punishing criminal versus rooting out causes on fear of crime, a moral traditionalism scale built from four items in the 1994 survey ( $\alpha=.70$ ), party identification and ideology (both from the 1995 survey), age, sex, race, and urban residence.<sup>12</sup> In the first column of Table 5 we see that fear of crime has important direct effects in shaping beliefs about whether criminal penalties are more effective in deterring crime, even

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<sup>12</sup> We initially included education and education<sup>2</sup> in the model, but they never achieved statistical significance. Education alone was also never statistically significant ( $p > .3$ ).

controlling for party identification and ideology. In the second column, we see that adding a measure of humanitarianism constructed from the new items on the pilot ( $\alpha=.70$ ) does not reduce the punch of fear of crime. Humanitarianism is an important additional predictor of crime prevention attitudes, but it does not diminish the power of fear of crime. Note too that fear of crime is as important as moral traditionalism in shaping this attitude (their standardized betas are nearly equivalent). Contrary to the claims of Gaubatz (1995), who argues that fear of crime plays no role in shaping views of criminal penalties, we find that it does. It is not simply the case that crime represents the last legitimate domain in which people can express traditional values. Moral traditionalism does shape, to some degree, people's views about how to address crime, but people's beliefs are also shaped by real fear of criminal victimization.

--Table 5 here--

We next examine the role of fear of crime in influencing evaluations of various social groups. We first examine fear of crime as a predictor of affect towards groups that are believed by many to be crime-prone, blacks and illegal immigrants. For comparison, we also use fear of crime to predict evaluations of people on welfare and gays and lesbians. These comparison will allow us to see whether fear of crime is a symptom of racial prejudice (and therefore, should affect evaluations of people on welfare) or authoritarianism (and therefore, should influence evaluations of gays and lesbians). We regressed the feeling thermometer scores for each of these four groups on fear of crime, the important predictors of fear of crime (e.g., attention to crime news, contextual variables), moral traditionalism, political knowledge, church attendance, party identification, ideology, and collective economic expectations.<sup>13</sup> With the exception of the fear of crime and attention to crime news variables, all other variables were measured in the

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<sup>13</sup> Dimock and Popkin (1995) and Quillian (1995) find that stressful economic conditions (real or perceived) provoke more prejudice toward immigrants and racial outgroups.

1994 survey.<sup>14</sup>

--Table 6 here--

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<sup>14</sup>We recognize that it is improper to use variables measured in 1995 to predict orientations measured in 1994. In instances where a variable measured in one data set is missing from another, Franklin (1990) would recommend constructing instruments for the 1995 variables using variables measured in 1994. These instruments could then be substituted for the actual 1995 variables in our equations. We chose not to implement this technique here for two reasons. First, considerable inefficiency is introduced from the first-stage regression. Second, Franklin (1990) demonstrates that in small samples, the estimated standard errors are "too large." We feared that we would be unable to find statistical significance for the two crime variables using Franklin's technique. For the purposes of this report, we decided to use the original variables rather than the instruments. As a consequence, the results in Table 6 must be treated as suggestive only.

Table 6 is cluttered, but the message is simple: the impact of fear of crime is extremely localized. It heavily influences, along with attention to crime news, feelings toward illegal immigrants, but nothing else. Clearly, people who fear crime or who pay attention to a lot of crime news look less favorably upon illegal immigrants. The phrase "illegal" no doubt acts as a lightning rod for these feelings and impressions. After all, illegal immigrants, by definition, have already broken the law. The important thing to take away from Table 6 is that fear of crime does not seem to prejudice people against other social groups; it is not an indiscriminate feeling that is projected onto other novel, deviant, or stigmatized outgroups. Indeed, what is striking to us is the lack of overlap in important predictors among the four social groups.<sup>15</sup> For example, pessimistic economic expectations are strongly linked to negative evaluations of blacks, but to no other group. The role of economic expectations is far stronger than either ideology, traditional values or fear of crime. While we have no desire to take on the racial prejudice literature in this pilot report, this analysis does suggest to us an important "realistic" (given certain expectations about the economy) group competition basis for feelings toward blacks (see Quillian 1995; Bobo 1983). Traditional values, on the other hand, are strongly related to evaluations of gays and lesbians, but only weakly related to attitudes toward illegal immigrants, and not at all related to evaluations of blacks or people on welfare. Living in a central city apparently makes one more tolerant of gays and lesbians, but does not significantly affect evaluations of the other groups. Education behaves differently for the different groups. For evaluations of gays and lesbians, more education produces sharply higher evaluations until one gets to the upper ends of the distribution, where education's effects flatten out. But for evaluations of illegal immigrants and blacks, those with some education beyond high school but no higher degrees (i.e., 4 on the education summary variable) have more negative evaluations

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<sup>15</sup> The overall F for the people on welfare equation is not significant ( $F=1.02$ ,  $p < .27$ ). We nevertheless present the coefficients for illustrative purposes.



than either those with less or more education. Perhaps this group feels the most "squeezed" by economic competition.

There are some similarities across groups, however. Women have higher evaluations for illegal immigrants, blacks and gays. Nonwhites have higher evaluations of blacks and illegal immigrants. Conservatives or Republicans have less positive attitudes toward these groups than liberals or Democrats.

In sum, people's hostilities toward various groups in American society seem rather compartmentalized, once political predispositions and demographic variables are controlled. It may be that fear of crime can get "attached" to different groups depending on politicians' efforts to direct these feelings. During the 1988 election, for example, fear of crime might have been more strongly linked to evaluations of blacks because of the advertising strategy used by the Bush campaign. One reason for including some fear of crime items in future NES surveys would be to test for just such campaign priming effects.

Finally, the last arena we explore for evidence of fear of crime's direct impact is on political system support attitudes. Support for American political institutions is complexly determined (see, e.g., Brehm and Rahn 1996; Lipset and Schneider 1987; Craig 1993; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995). Among the many expectations people have of government, surely public order and economic well-being are at the top of the list. When either of these functions is not fulfilled, we could expect support to decline. We investigated fear of crime's impact on two system support attitudes, trust in government and external efficacy. These are distinct orientations (Craig 1993; Rahn, Kroeger, and Kite 1996; Clore and Rahn 1995), and fear of crime may erode one without necessarily eroding the other.

In Table 7 we see that fear of crime operates much differently in these two aspects of system support; the difference is particularly glaring when one examines the role played by fear of crime and economic expectations in the two equations. Column 1 shows that higher fear of

crime diminishes belief that public officials care about what the respondents think; it is the only nondemographic variable that accounts for considerable variation in this measure of external efficacy. Since the Clinton feeling thermometer is unrelated to this item, it seems that lack of efficacy is less a personal complaint against particular officials (one would expect the head of state and government to bear the brunt of personalized frustration) than an expression of perceived impotence on the part of citizens generally, especially those who are frightened, who clearly see public officials as unresponsive to their concerns.

Column 2 shows that fear of crime is not part of some general feeling of anxiety that spills into many domains. Expectations of the economy's performance (which were only marginally significant with the external efficacy item), strongly predict the level of trust people have that their government will do the right thing. Additionally, the buck stops at the President on this item. His stewardship is far more relevant to trust in the government than is feeling safe from assault.

### **The Moderating Role of Fear of Crime**

Thus far we have established that fear of crime has different origins for different types of people and that it has a direct effect on crime policy attitudes, evaluations of illegal immigrants, and support of the political system. The last question we take up is the "Rabinowitz hypothesis"; i.e., whether fear of crime can moderate the impact of other variables. Marcus and MacKuen (1993; see also Marcus et al. 1995) have argued that anxiety, worry, fear and other negative feelings play a role in directing people's attention to their immediate context, disrupting standard routines. In the context of elections, these negative feelings can prompt greater learning of candidates' policy positions and reduce reliance on "standing decisions," such as partisanship (Marcus and MacKuen 1993). We examine this idea in the context of fear of crime by examining how fear affects the acquisition of political information and political participation.

The 1995 pilot asked respondents to judge how well they thought the term 'moral' and

the phrase 'provides strong leadership' described Bill Clinton and Bob Dole. After each question, the respondents were asked how certain they were about their answer. We used these 4 certainty items to create an index of certainty of candidate impressions, which generates a respectable  $\alpha=.71$ . The predictors of certainty are listed on Table 8. We based our choice of independent variables on the work of Alvarez and Franklin (1994), who find that individuals' certainty of candidates' issue positions is influenced by education, political information, sex, and race. To their list we add political interest, strength of partisanship, fear of crime, news exposure, moral traditionalism, and an interaction between fear and political knowledge.

--Table 8 here--

The fear of crime dummy shows that high fear respondents were far more unsure of their answers than low fear respondents. Negative emotions, such as fear, seem to serve as "danger signals" to people (Taylor 1991; Marcus and MacKuen 1993). This arousal directs attention to the immediate environment, narrowing attention and making people more cautious, and apparently, less certain. Thus, all else equal, fear of crime seems to prompt people to withdraw from and become less certain of the political world. However, we find that fear of crime is a strong mediator of political knowledge's influence on certainty. Among the fearful, increased political knowledge leads to more certainty of impressions. Responding to their threat, those with high fear seek information about political solutions to their fear. The interaction term shows that high fear of crime interacts with political knowledge such that knowledge becomes a positive force increasing the certainty with which people hold their impressions of the morality and strength of two leaders. Those who were not fearful, however, had no special motivation to seek additional information and their level of political knowledge shows no relationship to the certainty of their impressions of the candidates.

In some respects, these results are similar to the findings from research on fear appeals

in persuasion. Fear-arousing messages often do not motivate behavior change unless they are coupled with specific information about how to reduce the fear (for a review of the fear appeals literature, see Oskamp 1991). In a related finding, Nadeau, Niemi, and Amato (1995) show that anxiety about an issue by itself does not motivate issue importance. Only if threat is coupled with hopefulness does it motivate a political response (see also Marcus et al. 1995).

Table 9 tells a similar story, but this time for a behavioral measure. The 1994 ANES asked whether respondents had voted in the 1992 and 1994 elections. From these questions, we built an index of voter turnout with three points (voting in zero, one, or both elections). Again we see evidence of citizens seeking political solutions for a perceived lack of protection from the state. After controlling for several variables<sup>16</sup> that are known to influence voter turnout (see, e.g., Teixeira 1992), fear of crime has a substantial impact on the decision of whether to vote; fearful people are much less likely to turnout. By itself, education weakly (if at all) increases voter turnout. However, it powerfully interacts with fear of crime. The causal chain is similar to that of table 8. Fearful people want greater safety. For those people who palpably fear crime and are more highly educated (see the interaction term), this fear is channelled into the political system through the act of voting. Those who are fearful and have not had access to the civic tools provided by education become timid and withdraw from even this basic democratic ritual (see the large negative coefficient on the fear of crime dummy). We were surprised to find that the respondents' beliefs about the responsiveness of public officials (see our earlier table on external efficacy) did not soak up the action in this equation. Apparently those who fear crime and believe their government is uncaring withdraw from politics while those with higher education battle at the ballot box to see their needs met. Again we see that social connectedness (attending church, being married, living for many years in the same

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<sup>16</sup> Our original turnout equation included race, but it was not statistically significant.

community) can serve to overcome fear's demobilizing impact on political participation.<sup>17</sup>

--Table 9 here--

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The sharp drop in crime rates in many of the country's largest cities in 1994 and 1995 may well result in a reduction of the temptation to use crime as a campaign issue in 1996. However, crime has not dropped everywhere and many criminologists have sounded warnings about a demographic "time bomb" set to explode in the next five to ten years as the most violence-prone segment of the population, males between the ages of 15 and 24, swells in number. A Harris survey of teenagers released just this week (January 10th) showed that fear of violence is having a corrosive effect on the ability of many of America's kids to function well in school. Fear of crime currently afflicts over 40% of the adult population; kids who will come of age politically in the next few years can be expected to have even greater levels of fear, for their generation has been more affected by violent crime than any previous generation. We have shown that fear of crime is related both directly and indirectly to important political attitudes, evaluations, and behaviors. In particular, it's demobilizing impact has gone unremarked in the literature and deserves more serious attention given the numbers of people who fear criminal victimization. The inclusion of a single fear of crime question on future NES surveys seems to us well worth the investment, particularly if the predictions of criminologists are realized in the next decade.

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<sup>17</sup> We tried each interaction in each equation. The interaction with education was only significant on turnout and the interaction with political knowledge was only significant for the certainty of candidate impressions. Our guess is that the decision of whether voting will help stems from the basic civic awareness that education provides while attending to specific traits of candidates belongs to the realm of the political expert.

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Table 1  
The Demographic and Contextual Origins of Fear of Crime

<u>Independent Variables</u>	<u>Unstandardized Coefficient (standard error)</u>
Age	-.003 (.004)
Sex (1=male, 2=female)	.176# (.121)
Race (1=white, 0=nonwhite)	-.202 (.216)
Urban (1=central city, 0=else)	.328* (.188)
CA	.279 (.194)
TX	.386** (.184)
Education	.508** (.206)
Education <sup>2</sup>	-.069*** (.023)
Have kids	-.116 (.151)
Constant	1.51***
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.08
N	242

note: \*\*\* p < .01, \*\* p < .05, \* p < .10, # p < .15, two-tailed



Table 2  
Fear of Crime and Social Connectedness

<u>Independent Variables</u>	<u>Unstandardized Coefficient</u>
Age	-.003 (.004)
Sex (1=male, 2=female)	.202* (.122)
Race (1=white, 0=nonwhite)	-.163 (.214)
Urban (1=central city, 0=else)	.371** (.190)
CA	.284# (.197)
TX	.415** (.182)
Education	.503** (.205)
Education <sup>2</sup>	-.066*** (.023)
Have kids	-.113 (.160)
Marital Status	.126 (.130)
Length of Time in Community	.005*** (.002)
Frequency of Church Attendance	-.043 (.033)
Constant	1.295**
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.10
N	247

note: \*\*\* p < .01, \*\* p < .05, \* p < .10, # p < .15, two-tailed

Table 3  
Fear of Crime and Media "Cultivation"

<u>Independent Variables</u>	<u>Coefficient</u> <u>(standard error)</u>
Age	-.007# (.004)
Sex (1=Male, 2=Female)	.187# (.124)
Race (1=white, 0=nonwhite)	-.001 (.225)
Urban (1=Central city, 0=else)	.301# (.184)
CA	.274 (.193)
TX	.327* (.180)
Education	.536** (.207)
Education <sup>2</sup>	-.067*** (.024)
TV knowledge	-.050 (.038)
Nights of TV news viewing in past week	.027 (.029)
Attention to Crime News	.278*** (.010)
Viewing Frequency, NYPD Blue	.099 (.079)
Viewing Frequency, Prime Time Live	.097 (.074)
Constant	.211
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.14
N	234

note: \*\*\* p < .01, \*\* p < .05, \* p < .10, # p < .15, two-tailed

Table 4  
The Impact of News about Crime on Fear  
by Church Attendance

<u>Independent Variables</u>	<u>Coefficient</u> (standard error)	<u>Coefficient</u> (standard error)
	High Church Attendance	Low Church Attendance
Age	-.011# (.007)	-.002 (.005)
Sex	-.125 (.200)	.303** (.152)
Race	.406 (.380)	-.092 (.283)
Urban	-.393 (.400)	.484** (.206)
CA	-.487 (.370)	.410* (.216)
TX	.409 (.286)	.470** (.232)
Education	.760* (.402)	.519** (.356)
Education <sup>2</sup>	-.091** (.045)	-.063** (.043)
TV knowledge	.052 (.063)	-.068# (.042)
Nights of TV news viewing in past week	.057 (.049)	-.010 (.034)
Attention to Crime News	.087 (.172)	.478*** (.118)
Length of time in Community	.006* (.003)	.003 (.002)
Constant	.355	-.332
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.12	.23
N	87	146

note: \*\*\* p < .01, \*\* p < .05, \* p < .10, # p < .15, two-tailed

Table 5  
Beliefs about the Best Way to Combat Crime  
Low = Address Causes                      High = Severely Punish Criminals

<u>Independent Variables</u>	<u>Coefficient</u> (standard error)	<u>Coefficient</u> (standard error)
Age	-.007# (.009)	-.010 (.010)
Sex (1=Male, 2=Female)	-.565** (.283)	-.416# (.285)
Race (1=White, 0=nonwhite)	.984* (.565)	1.12** (.553)
Urban (1=Central City, 0=other)	-.274 (.483)	.003 (.497)
1995 Party Identification (0 = Strong Democrat)	.229*** (.086)	.186** (.085)
1995 Ideology (Low = Very Liberal)	.168 (.137)	.157 (.136)
Fear of Crime	.298** (.146)	.257* (.146)
Moral Traditionalism	.055 (.044)	.072# (.043)
Humanitarianism Scale		-.075*** (.027)
Constant	.247	2.54**
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.198	.23
N	151	148

note: \*\*\* p < .01, \*\* p < .05, \* p < .10, # p < .15, two-tailed

Table 6  
Fear of Crime and Evaluations of Social Groups

	<b>Illegal Immigrants</b>	<b>Blacks</b>	<b>People on Welfare</b>	<b>Gays and Lesbians</b>
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<u>Independent Variables</u>				
Fear of Crime	-5.24*** (2.01)	-.974	.710 (1.57)	-1.53 (2.08)
Attention to Crime News	-5.59* (2.95)		.790 (2.28)	-2.72 (3.03)
Moral Traditionalism (higher=more traditional)	-.958# (.624)		.173 (.483)	-2.20*** (.637)
Collective Economic Expectations (higher=more optimistic)	.545 (1.30)		3.08*** (1.01)	.035 (1.34)
1994 Ideology (higher=Conservative)	-1.08 (1.68)	-2.00#	-2.57 (1.73)	-5.92*** (1.73)
1994 Party Identification (higher=Republican)	-2.01** (.998)		.095 (.772)	-1.14 (1.03)
Frequency of Church Attendance	.938 (1.07)	1.39*	2.13* (.832)	-1.14 (1.10)
Education	-11.16* (6.25)		-10.00** (4.83)	-5.34 (6.46)
Education <sup>2</sup>	1.29* (.706)		1.18** (.549)	.651 (.733)

continued on next page

Race	-9.77# (6.06)	-22.25*** (4.65)	2.02 (6.19)	7.95 (6.28)
Sex	6.42** (3.61)	9.33** (2.81)	-2.84 (3.71)	9.51*** (3.67)
Urban	4.77 (5.27)	5.58 (4.04)	4.03 (5.39)	13.10** (5.33)
CA	5.42 (5.34)	-5.79 (4.18)	-10.76* (5.48)	2.66 (5.40)
TX	7.15# (5.15)	-2.14 (4.03)	2.46 (5.28)	-2.28 (5.31)
Political Knowledge	.240 (.272)	.325 (.214)	.159 (.282)	.383 (.291)
Constant	100***	75.8***	72.48***	28.97
Adj. R2	.183	.24	.02	.37
N	183	181	184	185

note: \*\*\* p < .01, \*\* p < .05, \* p < .10, # p < .15, two-tailed

--Table 7--

The Impact of Fear of Crime on System Support Attitudes

<u>Independent Variables</u>	<u>Unstandardized Coefficients</u> (standard error)	
	<b>External Efficacy</b> Public Officials Don't Care Much What People Like Me Think Thing (High = Strongly Disagree)	<b>Trust</b> Trust in Government To Do the Right Thing (High = Just About Always)
Age	-.006 (.005)	-.002 (.004)
Sex (1=Male, 2=Female)	.293** (.152)	-.028 (.123)
Race (1=White, 0=nonwhite)	.452* (.269)	.625*** (.219)
Education	.180*** (.049)	-.056 (.039)
Clinton Feeling Thermometer	.003 (.003)	.009*** (.002)
Nat'l Economic Expectations (higher=more optimistic)	.086# (.056)	.122*** (.045)
Fear of Crime	-.155** (.079)	-.015 (.064)
Constant	1.052	.463
Adj. R2	.09	.11
N	230	231

note: \*\*\* p < .01, \*\* p < .05, \* p < .10, # p < .15, two-tailed

--Table 8--  
 Fear of Crime and Certainty of Candidate Impressions  
 (Higher scores indicate R more certain whether Clinton and Dole are 'moral' and  
 'provide strong leadership'  $\alpha=.71$ )

<u>Independent Variables</u>	<u>Unstandardized Coefficients</u> (standard error)
Age	-.016# (.011)
Sex	-.134 (.316)
Race	-.226 (.598)
Urban	-.305 (.466)
Party Identification (0=Strong Democrat)	.138# (.088)
Ideology	.146 (.144)
Nights of TV News in Past Week	.107# (.072)
Interest in Politics	.355*** (.111)
Political Knowledge	-.030 (.036)
Strength of Partisanship	-.056 (.159)
Moral Traditionalism	-.014 (.049)
Fear of Crime Dummy (0=Low Fear, 1=High Fear)	-3.720*** (1.346)
Fear of Crime x Pol. Knowledge	.096** (.045)
Constant	8.100
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.24
N	136

note: \*\*\* p < .01, \*\* p < .05, \* p < .10, # p < .15, two-tailed



Table 9  
Fear of Crime and Turnout  
(Higher scores indicate more voting participation)

<u>Independent Variables</u>	<u>Unstandardized Coefficients</u> (Standard Errors)
Age	.007** (.003)
Sex	.164** (.097)
Education	.035 (.071)
Political Knowledge	.018** (.008)
Interest in Politics	.131*** (.035)
Strength of Partisanship	.046 (.048)
Years in Community	.023* (.002)
Have Kids	-.021 (.121)
Married	.188* (.101)
Attend Church	.036# (.025)
Public Officials Care	.034 (.040)
Fear of Crime Dummy (0=Low Fear, 1=High Fear)	-.526** (.264)
Interaction Fear Dummy X Education	.103* (.062)
Constant	-.641
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.28
N	231

note: \*\*\* p < .01, \*\* p < .05, \* p < .10, # p < .15, two-tailed

