
Safety and Opportunity as the Touchstones for Vibrant Civic Life

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SUMMARY

QUESTION: ***WHAT ROLE DOES PUBLIC SAFETY PLAY IN ACHIEVING ECONOMIC VIBRANCY IN NEW YORK CITY?***

WHY IMPORTANT:

1. Public safety is one foundation stone of economic vibrancy. While New York City has long prided itself as the safest city in the nation with the lowest incarceration rate, the widespread protests against police violence last year occurring as the nation experienced the single steepest rise in shootings highlighted the tensions endemic in the methods we use to ensure safety. The police and criminal justice system have an important role to play in safety. But their dominance of public space has also exacted a price, reflected in plummeting cooperation by residents. At the same time, community organizations and civic resources have demonstrable and immediate effects in creating safer streets. Despite the evidence, the city continues to invest overwhelmingly in the criminal justice system as the single antidote to crime, blinkered from its costs or other strategies, with each year's budget building on the unexamined base of the previous year.
 2. Over the past seven years, the city's expenditures on its criminal justice agencies have risen by 17% in real dollars, as the activity has dropped by half. Today the annual cost of detaining a person in the city's jails is well north of \$400,000. This criminal justice system activity as well as violence and privation are concentrated, largely in communities of color which are also isolated by segregation and undermined by a history of other kinds of economic discrimination. The conditions of inequality incubate violence and mean that the same neighborhoods will be vulnerable to violence and will be the most affected by rising or falling violence.
 3. The city's is modeling a new concept, that is not yet complete but is promising. It is founded on a long line of research and human experience which shows that when neighborhood connections and trust are strong (collective efficacy), violence is low. Approaching safety with this lens solves multiple intersecting issues at once and iteratively both shrinks the justice system and strengthens civic society. However, this effort has lacked a single champion with power, such as a deputy mayor, who could maintain the through line across the multiple agencies and disciplines necessary to shift the focus of the city's approach with consistency and forethought.
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RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Build a strong model of safety with clear goals, based on the science, centered in excellent delivery of civic services, guided by community aspirations and knowledge.
2. Shrink the justice system apparatus and uses to the irreducible minimum.



3. Treat public safety as a democracy project with maximum transparency into its operations and the results.



CONSTRAINTS:

1. Under the leadership of a civilian with authority, such as a Deputy Mayor for Justice Policy and Operations, every city dollar must be pressure tested to ensure it is buying the most safety possible.
2. The city can and should be the arterial structure of reform because it is the only institution with the budget and structure to execute at scale.



INTRODUCTION

New York City's next mayor has an opportunity to jumpstart our civic life, increase racial and economic equality and create a durable peace. These are not separate enterprises but interlocking pieces of a single goal: to create a thriving city, attending to the well-being of every New Yorker. But as a nation and a city, we have largely treated safety as the province of the police and the criminal justice system alone, instead of one thread in a strong and self-reinforcing social fabric.

The price of the default to the police and, more broadly, the criminal justice system for safety has been high, benching an entire generation and more from participation in social and economic life: in New York City, one third of Black men living in poor zip codes are jailed by age 38, men who overwhelmingly do not finish high school.¹ The effects reverberate in the neighborhoods that bear the brunt of violence and also have more than their share of every other kind of social distress from unemployment to Covid deaths. And, in the wake of George Floyd's murder, the waning confidence in this system as the way to keep us safe has been sharply on display, a troubling trend for a system dependent on public trust.

The justice system has a role to play in safety. But what that role is, how supervised and implemented and, critically, in the context of what other effective approaches that nurture safe, healthy, and prosperous communities, without the inherent toxicity of a system based on coercion, are the questions we must steel ourselves to answer. City government is not naturally oriented toward asking these questions or seeking the answers in a regular, disciplined and coordinated way. The failure to perform this function has resulted in an escalating spend on the justice system, blinkered from its costs and uncoordinated from other civic investments. Each year's budget builds on the unexamined base of the previous year. Between 2013 and 2020, the city's expenditures on its criminal justice agencies rose by 17% in real dollars, even as the activity – measured in arrests and people in jail – has dropped by half. Today the annual cost of detaining a person in the city's jails is well north of \$400,000.²

There is another way to create a thriving city and New York City, in pockets, has been in the vanguard modeling this over the last few years.³ It recognizes what the long history of experience and science has shown us: tight-knit communities where residents have access to well-delivered civic services and strong local institutions are safer and more vibrant places to live.⁴ This was the unfulfilled promise of the Kerner Commission⁵ and the 1935 LaGuardia Commission⁶ before it. Both emerged out of conflicts resulting from deep racial inequities and tensions. Recognizing the scarring impact that inequality of access to opportunity caused, both saw significant investments in the social fabric as the way to civic peace and prosperity – a way to unwind “two societies, one black, one white, separate and unequal.” Decades of research and experience have only confirmed their recommendations.⁷

To realize this promise we need to build on the foundation already being laid and develop a civic muscle as visible and deployable towards the well-being of New Yorkers as the police are. All the tools that can make us safe – from summer youth employment to physical design of streets to criminal justice operations – must be synthesized into a single strategy, with measurable goals. Under the leadership of a civilian with authority, such as a Deputy Mayor for Justice Policy and Operations, every city dollar must be pressure tested to ensure it is buying the most safety possible. The city can and should be the

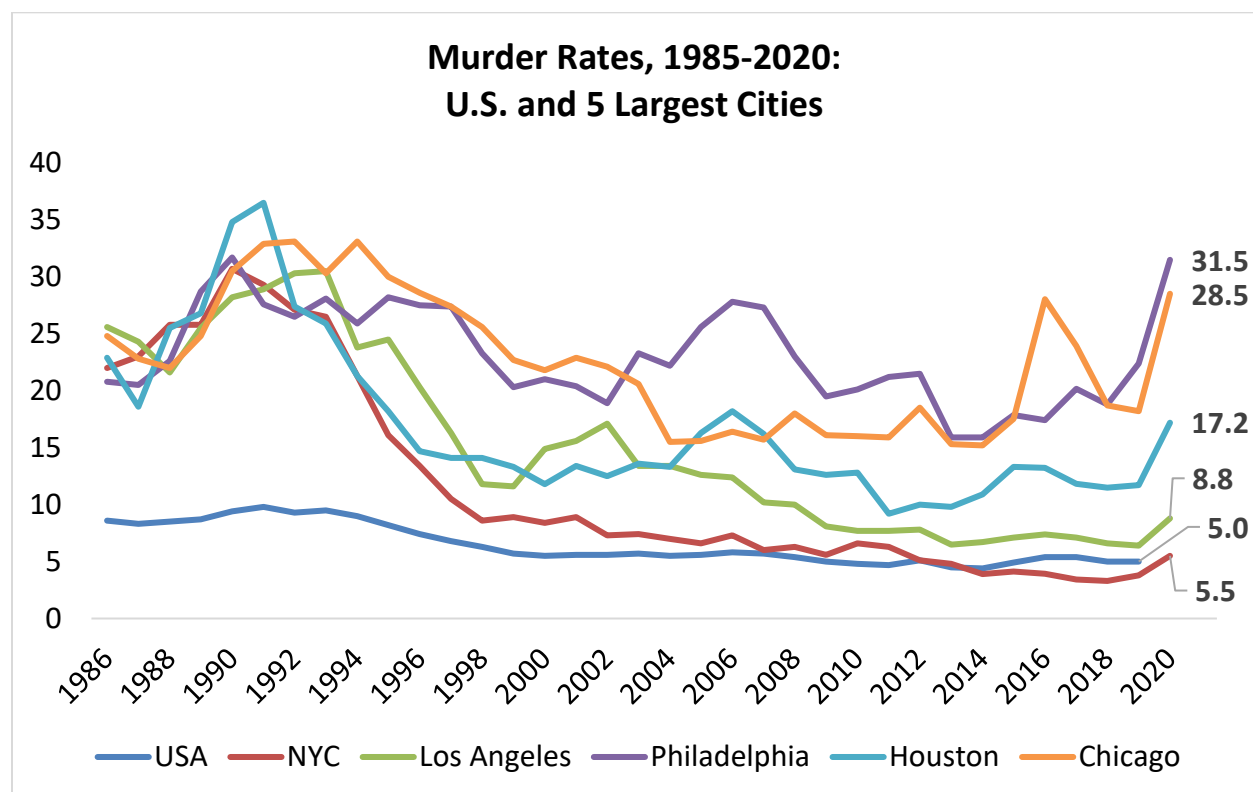


arterial structure of well-being because it is the only institution with the budget and structure to execute at scale. It is time to do it.

HOW SAFETY BECAME SYNONYMOUS WITH POLICE ACTION: THE FISCAL AND HUMAN COST

New York City prides itself as the safest large city in the nation with the lowest incarceration rate. For the past three decades, the city's pattern of crime and incarceration has largely mirrored the rest of the nation except that the declines here have been steeper and more durable. That is still the case, even in the wake of the pandemic related spike in violence that New York, like most big cities across the nation, experienced starting last summer.⁸

Figure 1: Murder rates of US and Five Largest Cities, 1985-2020

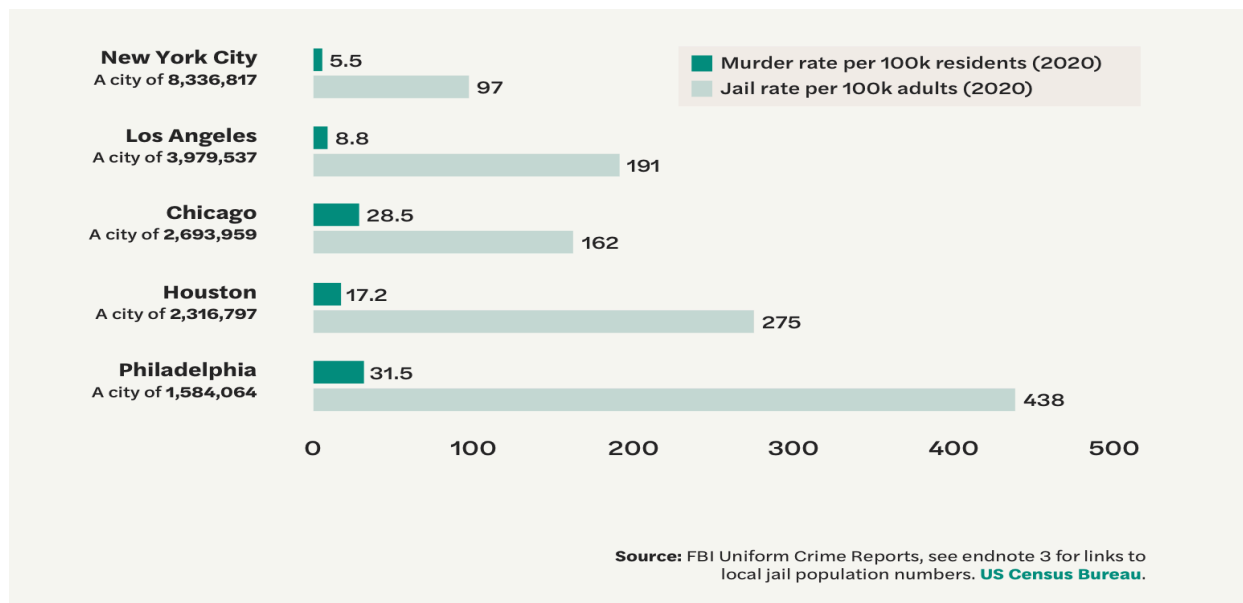


Over the past eight years, with crime continuing to fall, New York City reduced the number of people in jail to levels not seen since the 1940's⁹ and, in other ways, retrenched the reach of the criminal justice system into the lives of New Yorkers. Proving that it was possible to have more safety with less justice system touch, the city began to rely less on police and more on other forms of social regulation – for example, supporting familial and neighborhood networks, employing civilian violence interrupters --to change behavior. By the beginning of 2019, police activity, which had almost entirely affected young



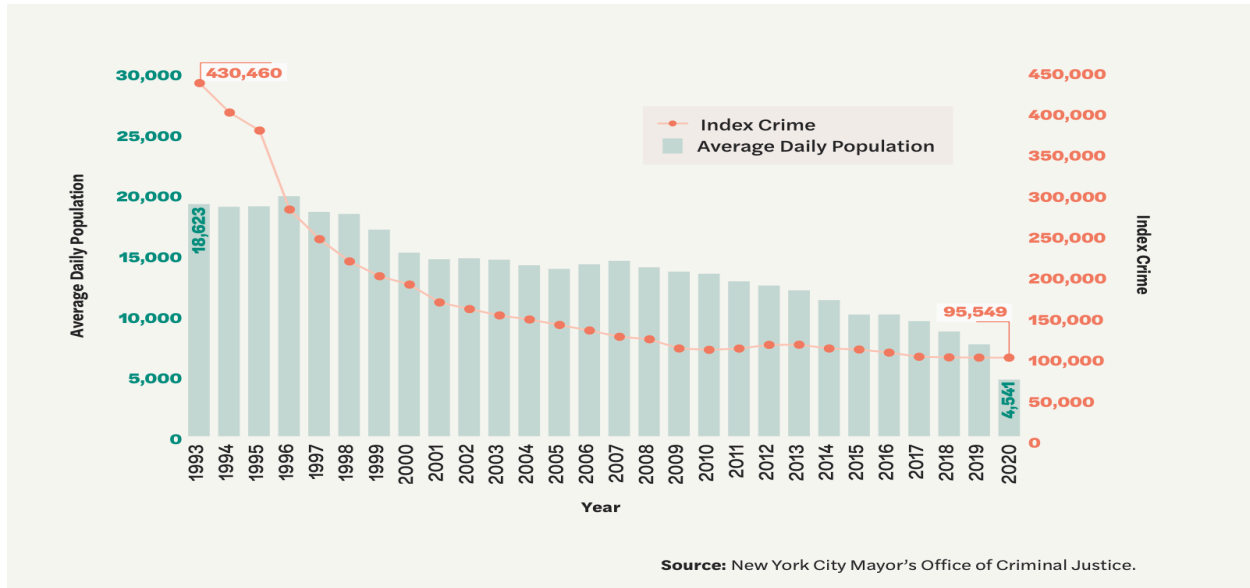
men of color, declined with stops – ruled unconstitutional¹⁰ as conducted -- down 93% from a high of almost 700,000 in 2010, along with reductions in summonses (down 99% since their 2009 peak), marijuana arrests (down 99% since their 2011 peak) and arrests overall (down 45%, driven largely by misdemeanor arrest declines).¹¹ Some of these reductions resulted from policy changes, such as the police approach to marijuana arrests, but some – like the steep reduction in murders – occurred, in part, because behavior and norms simply have changed.

Figure 2: Murder and Incarceration Rate for five largest US cities



The shrinking of the justice system apparatus followed a national awakening to the harms that the justice system imposes, particularly on communities of color.¹² Following a sharp rise in crime, peaking in the early 1990s, New York City, like the nation, adopted a style of crime control that relied on arrest and incarceration as the primary antidote to crime, with arrest applied to a broad range of behaviors from civil annoyances to violent crime. The national imprisonment rate had hovered around 100 state and federal prisoners for 100,000 Americans for most of the country's history and then it skyrocketed to over 500 per 100,000 in the 1980s and continued to rise to levels unprecedented in US history and unmatched across the world.¹³ By 1991, city jails held over 22,000 people, a rate of 375 people for every 100,000 adult New Yorkers.¹⁴

Figure 3: Incarceration and crime over time in NYC



With the expansion of the justice system apparatus, budgets grew exponentially as well, rising 186% in real dollars nationally during the nearly four decades since 1982.¹⁵ In New York City, for example, the number of NYPD officers rose from 26,000 to 40,000 between 1990 and 2019 with costs per capita that are 2.2 times the national average, the second highest in the nation (after Washington, DC).¹⁶ Today the NYPD ranks seventh in the world in size compared to the armies of several countries. Its functions have bled into areas traditionally performed by the civilian side of government (including employment programs, graffiti clean-up, bee-keeping, mental health and homeless outreach, vaccination centers) or family and neighborhood life (running community centers, building basketball courts, organizing outings for poor children).¹⁷ The Department of Correction which runs the city's jails, employs approximately 10,000 officers to watch over approximately 5,000 incarcerated people, the same number of officers as 18 years ago when the number of people incarcerated topped 14,000.¹⁸ If measured by "per unit" cost, using arrest and number of people incarcerated, the cost of arrest has increased 161% over the past seven years and cost of incarceration has increased by 118%.¹⁹

While experts still argue about the degree of impact the heavy reliance on punishment had and is having on the nation's and the city's crime rates, the deleterious impacts, tearing the social fabric of communities of color is undisputed. By 2008 the incarceration rate for young Black men who had dropped out of high school was 37% compared to the general population at .76 of 1 percent. For the cohort born between 1975 and 1979, the lifetime risk of imprisonment for Black men is one in four.²⁰

The massive encroachment of law enforcement into poor neighborhoods had another cost as well: intended to increase safety, it undermined trust in the police. The phenomenon of under protection ("why don't you come when I call?") and overenforcement ("why are you stopping my son on the way to the grocery store?") is well-documented.²¹ Among other things, it has increased cynicism in communities of color about the fairness and efficacy of the justice system²² -- showing up in low case clearance and conviction rates -- igniting a vicious cycle of waning confidence in the justice system and



leading to a more widespread distrust of government as a whole and further withdrawal from participation in other civic enterprises, for example, voting. ²³

The damage that arrest and imprisonment does to derail a life course is most evident in the handful of neighborhoods – home largely to Black and Brown New Yorkers – in which privation and violence concentrate. These neighborhoods, already isolated by segregation and undermined by a history of other kinds of economic discrimination like redlining²⁴, have borne the brunt of distress in almost every domain for decades. This noxious knot of issues is important because of the effect of the conditions of poverty on violence and the effect of violence on every aspect of life.

Since the height of the violence in New York City in the 1990s, the same group of neighborhoods have led the city in shootings and these ten of the city's 77 precincts account for 40% ²⁵of the shootings.

Figure 4: NYC Neighborhoods with highest number of shootings 1993, 2019, 2020

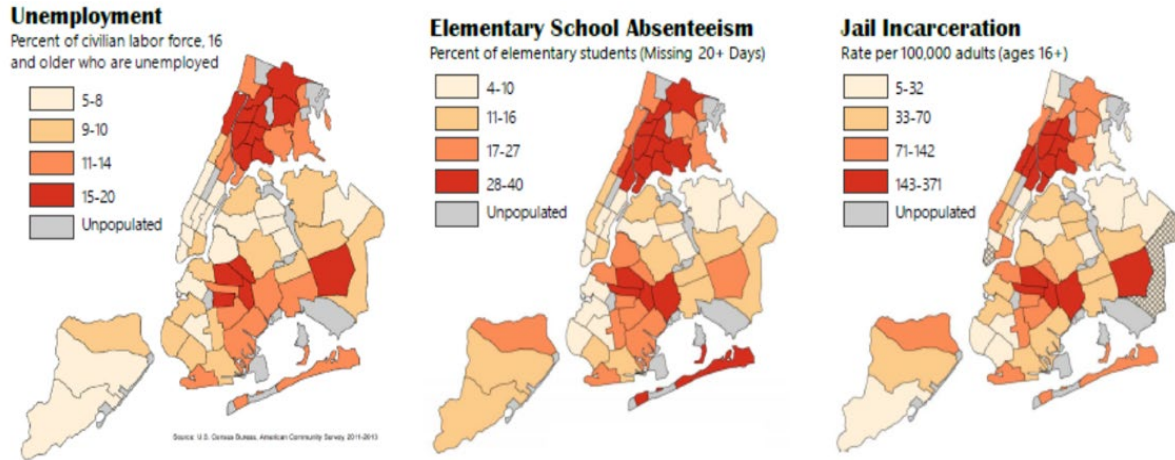
1993 (precinct)	# of shootings		2019 (precinct)	# of shootings		2020 (precinct)	# of shootings
Brownsville (73rd)	304		East New York (75th)	51		East New York (75th)	102
East New York (75th)	283		Brownsville (73rd)	34		Brownsville (73rd)	96
Bedford Stuyvesant (79th)	241		Morrisania (42nd)	31		Bedford Stuyvesant (79th)	61
Northern Crown Heights (77th)	238		Bedford Stuyvesant (79th)	30		East Flatbush (67th)	60
Bushwick (83rd)	218		East Flatbush (67th)	29		Mott Haven (40 th)	55
East Flatbush (67th)	202		Grand Concourse (44th)	29		Northern Crown Heights (77th)	54
Mott Haven (40th)	193		West Bronx (46th)	27		Grand Concourse (44th)	49
Grand Concourse (44th)	165		Jamaica (113rd)	27		Woodlawn (47 th)	46
West Bronx (46th)	161		Northern Crown Heights (77th)	25		Morrisania (42 nd)	44
Bedford Stuyvesant (81st)	156		Woodlawn (47 th)	23		West Bronx (46th)	44

Source: NYPD

Brownsville, Mott Haven, East New York are familiar names in a rollcall of distress that starts with everything from high unemployment, infant mortality and COVID deaths and ends in violence.



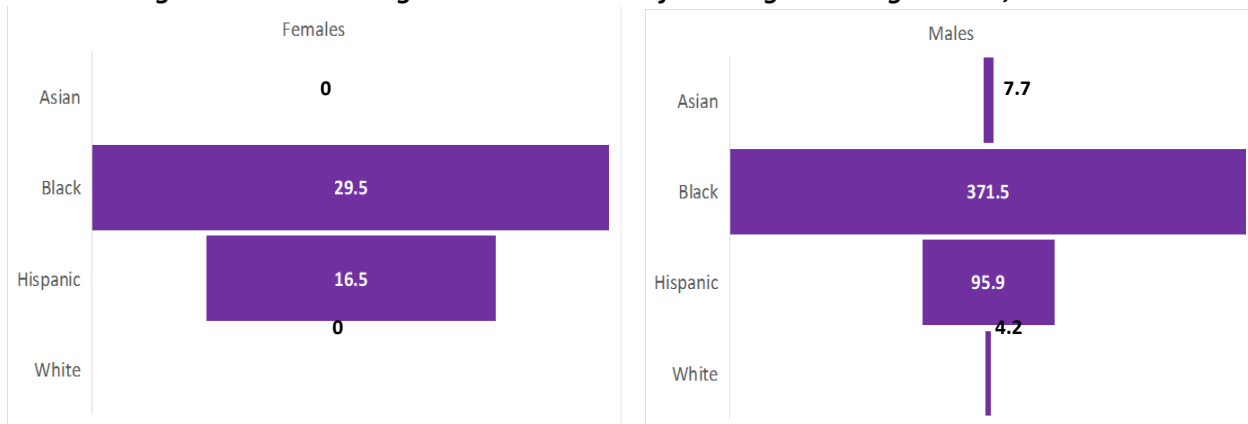
Figure 5: Social distress in NYC Neighborhoods



Sources: Bailey et al., 2017; Hinton 2016; Sharkey 2017; Williams and Collins 2001; Western & Pettit 2005; Wildeman & Wang 2017

Brownsville, for example, has the highest incarceration rate of all neighborhoods citywide. 28% of the residents live below the poverty line, eight percentage points higher than the City's average.²⁶ Not everyone is safe everywhere: citywide the rate of shooting victimization for a young black man has historically hovered at about thirty times greater for than for a young white man, skyrocketing to almost ninety times in 2021.

Figure 6: NYC Shooting Victimization Rates for Young Adults Ages 18-24, YTD2021



Violence affects everything. It not only tears apart families, it also has cascading effects on everyone in the neighborhood. For example, studies show that the effect on children who observe violence is as if they had “missed the previous two years of schooling and regressed back their level of cognitive performance from years earlier.”²⁷ Domestic violence, often hidden behind closed doors, also has a

ripple effect, accounting for the second largest group of people being admitted to shelter. In 2017, domestic violence drove 40% of assaults and 20% of murders.²⁸ When policy makers decide where to focus their energy, violence must be the target because of its intersection with every aspect of urban life.

Yet, when crime, particularly violent crime, increases, the reflex is to “flood the zone” and otherwise rely almost entirely on law enforcement power. To be sure, addressing violence is where police may have the most effect and, across the whole range of conduct that merits state intervention, violence is at the top of the list. But violence is complicated in its causes, and addressing it calls for a modulated and synthesized approach. This is in part because other approaches are effective – for example, breaking the cycles of retaliation that fuel shooting spikes by intervening in the hospital where the gunshot victim is recovering; or changing the physical environment to be inhospitable to crime. But experience and science also counsel a more balanced approach because of the inherent limits of law enforcement (reactive not preventive) and the uneasy relationship with residents.

Police and the criminal justice system are important pieces of the answer to crime. There are many things that they can do that no one else can or should. And they have played a role in the reduction of crime over the years. It is just that safety does not, and should not, start with the police. Reaching the right balance requires a clear-eyed understanding and agreement about what functions and at what costs should the criminal justice system be responsible and what should others, or no one, continue to do.

A NEW MODEL, CENTERED IN CIVICSERVICES AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Over the past eight years, recognizing the intertwined nature of crime, social distress, and economic hardship, the city moderated the reach of justice system while still reducing crime. This occurred both with respect to decisions by police and prosecutors as to the kinds of conduct that merits arrest and punishment but also with respect to decisions by judges as to when jail is necessary. Here a big investment in opening up options for judges to use instead of jail found an enthusiastic response among the judiciary. Judges opting for programs instead of jail drove approximately half of the jail population reduction, as crime continued to decline.²⁹

But beyond the reshaping of the uses of the justice system itself, the administration began shaping a new model for safety, breaking the justice system’s monopoly on safety. This new model is grounded in a long line of research and human experience that shows where neighborhood connections and trust are strong (a phenomenon known as collective efficacy)³⁰ and -- often manifested in strong community institutions³¹ -- all types of crime and disorder are far lower.

Instead of starting with police and the justice system to respond after the harm has occurred, this approach works to prevent harm by helping people lead healthy, productive lives. Investments and supports focus on strengthening family and neighborhood networks, opening up opportunity, delivering civic services and improving the physical environment. It weaves together the learning, based on the



most rigorous standards of evaluation showing that, for example, neighborhoods with strong civic groups have lower murder rates, summer youth employment reduces deaths by 18% and incarceration by 54%;³² lighting NYCHA grounds reduces nighttime felony crime by 30%;³³ providing afterschool sports programs along with therapy reduces arrests for violent crime by 45-50%,³⁴ among many other strategies.³⁵ Approaching safety with this lens solves multiple intersecting issues at once and iteratively both shrinks the justice system and strengthens civic society.

Importantly, these approaches also make community leaders and ordinary residents' architects of their own safety, shifting power from the police and the justice system to local entities both formal and informal, relying on the oldest regulating power that there is: families and community. This approach – though scattered in the city – has shown results. For example, community groups trained in defusing disputes reduced shootings by 30% more than in comparable neighborhoods without the benefit of this strategy.³⁶ Through “Neighborhoodstat”³⁷, the city provided a forum to bring together residents, city agencies, and community organizations to identify and address the underlying drivers of crime, from unemployment and substance use to crumbling parks and garbage-strewn vacant lots. Creating safety with the input and consent of the governed has produced impressive results, including the Neighborhood sites reducing violence at almost four times the rate of developments without this approach.³⁸

The Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice dubbed this approach the “civilianization” or “democratization” of safety.³⁹ The police department and the criminal justice system still play an important role, but it is cabined by civilian authority and deployed in consultation with the community, attentive to what is the province of the police alone and what is done by other people with other skills.

Despite these important steps forward, the effort has lacked a single champion with power, such as a deputy mayor, who could maintain the through line across the multiple agencies necessary to shift the focus of the city's approach with forethought, discipline and consistency citywide.

One signal of both the lack of a unified approach to safety, and the increasing deference to the police as the driving spokesperson on the facts and the solutions, has been the ballooning of the budgets of the criminal justice agencies as their activity has dropped by half. It does not appear that anyone is asking and following up with actions in a regular, coordinated, and comprehensive way: what is the purpose of police, corrections and the criminal justice system?⁴⁰ Put another way: are we buying the most safety for every dollar invested, whether in police or in jobs?



Figure 7: Cost per work metric of NYC Criminal Justice Agencies

Cost of NYC Justice Agencies by Unit of Work, FY14 and FY20.

	Cost/Work Metric (constant \$)						
	FY2014	FY2020	change	change%	FY2014	FY2020	change%
NYPD Arrests	396,460	175,809	-220,651	-56%	\$11,998	\$31,335	161%
DOC Population	11,408	5,841	-5,567	-49%	\$93,365	\$203,170	118%
Probation (Adult)	23,805	14,504	-9,301	-39%	\$3,499	\$7,596	117%
DA Arraignments*	174,313	120,045	-54,268	-31%	\$1,699	\$3,513	107%

Source: New York City Mayor's Office of Management and Budget 2021a; New York City Mayor's Office of Management and Budget 2021b; New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice 2021b; Fuleihan and Thamkittikasem 2020, and Fox and Koppel 2021.

Notes: The 2020 per unit costs and the percentage increase between FY2014 and FY2020 when not adjusted for inflation are as follows: NYPD Arrests \$34,600 +188%; DOC Population \$224,343 +140%; Probation (Adult) \$8,387 +139%; DA Arraignments \$3,880 +128%. All agency work metrics are by fiscal year, except arraignments which are by calendar year.

Figure 8: Budget growth and operation reductions in NYC Criminal Justice Agencies

New York City Budget and Work Metrics by Agency, FY14 and FY20.

Expenditures in nominal \$	FY 2014 adopted	FY 20 modified	Change	Work metrics	Change
NYPD	\$4,756,863,015	\$6,082,976,755	28%	Arrests	-56%
Civilian Complain Review Board	\$11,916,954	\$19,357,183	62%		
Department of Correction	\$1,065,104,863	\$1,310,387,219	23%	Avg. Daily Population	-49%
Board of Correction	\$939,848	\$2,723,111	190%		
Department of Probation	\$83,304,979	\$121,645,970	46%	Docket Juveniles	-70%
				Docket Adults	-39%
District Attorneys	\$296,160,764	\$465,724,536	57%	Arraignments	-31%
Indigent Defense	\$253,492,418	\$379,438,404	50%	Intakes	Not publicly available
Total-nominal	\$6,467,782,841	\$8,382,253,178	30%		
Adjusted for inflation		\$7,141,800,000	17%		

Sources: New York City Mayor's Office of Management and Budget 2021a; New York City Mayor's Office of Management and Budget 2021b; New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice 2021b; City of New York 2020, and Fox and Koppel 2021.

Notes: *The agency costs listed here are exclusive of fringe benefits and pension costs which can be as much as almost 100% of the total personnel costs. For example, DOC fringe and benefits, not included in budget above, amount to \$1,073,262,879. All agency work metrics are by fiscal year, except arraignments which are by calendar year. Budget by agency data come from New York City Office of Management and Budget 2021a and 201b. All work metrics, except 2, come from City of New York 2020. Arrest work metrics come from New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services 2020a. Arraignment work metrics come from New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice 2021b.



LESSONS FROM 2020 AND 2021

The tensions and contradictions in our current police-centric approach to safety were tested last year and the choices that we must make are now both prominent and urgent. In May 2020, as the city began to emerge gradually from lockdown, George Floyd's murder sent millions in the streets across the nation. They expressed a long-rankling anger about police violence and unequal treatment of communities of color. In New York City, the largely peaceful protests against brutality were met by a show of force with riot-gearred police. Several investigations noted with concern NYPD's disproportionate and repeated use of force by the police and the apparent official sanctioning of its deployment by police department.⁴¹ Apparently, the NYPD's decision to repeatedly use force during the summer of protests and beyond was made without consultation with the PD's nominal supervisor, the Mayor. The investigations raised the question of who controls the police?

Meanwhile, in mid-May shootings skyrocketed to levels not seen in a decade, a pattern repeated in every other large city in the country. The traditional tools of the criminal justice system failed, as the number of residents coming forward to cooperate fell to new lows and police retreated from the streets.⁴² Cooperation rates fell to the low 20% range, that is, approximately one in five shooting cases were solved. New York City shared this singular rise in violence with other cities across the nation, pointing towards causes that stem from the collapse of basic structures that regulate neighborhood life – work, school and play – and under the pressures of exponential rates of Covid infection and other mental and social pressures that undermined family and social life.⁴³ If social pressure and distress are the cause, addressing those dynamics may be the solution.⁴⁴

Figure 9: Shooting Incidents in New York City

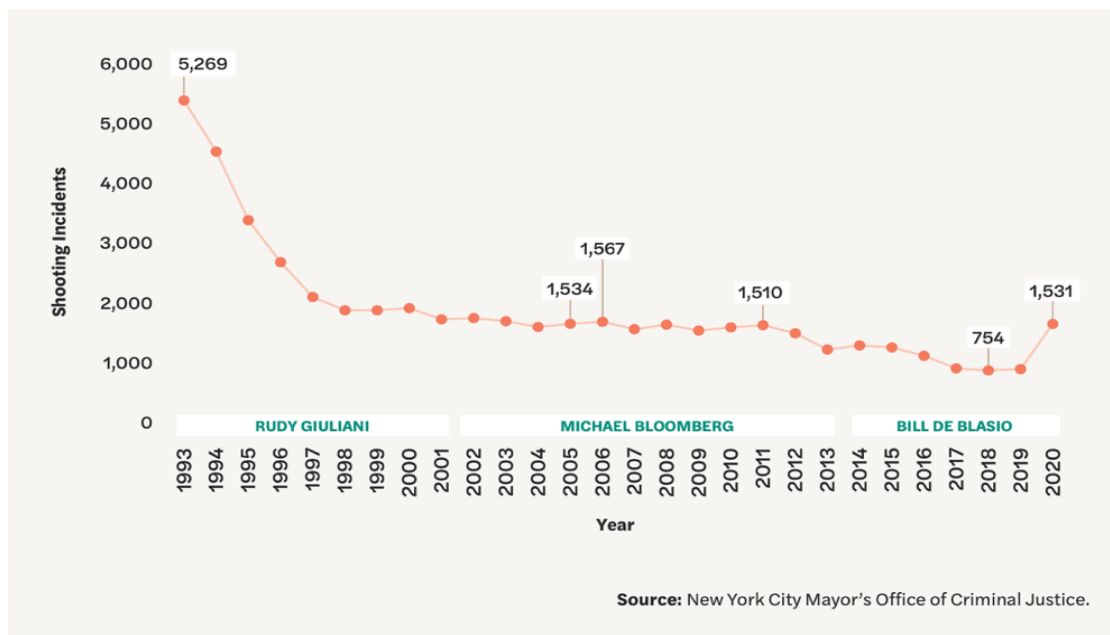
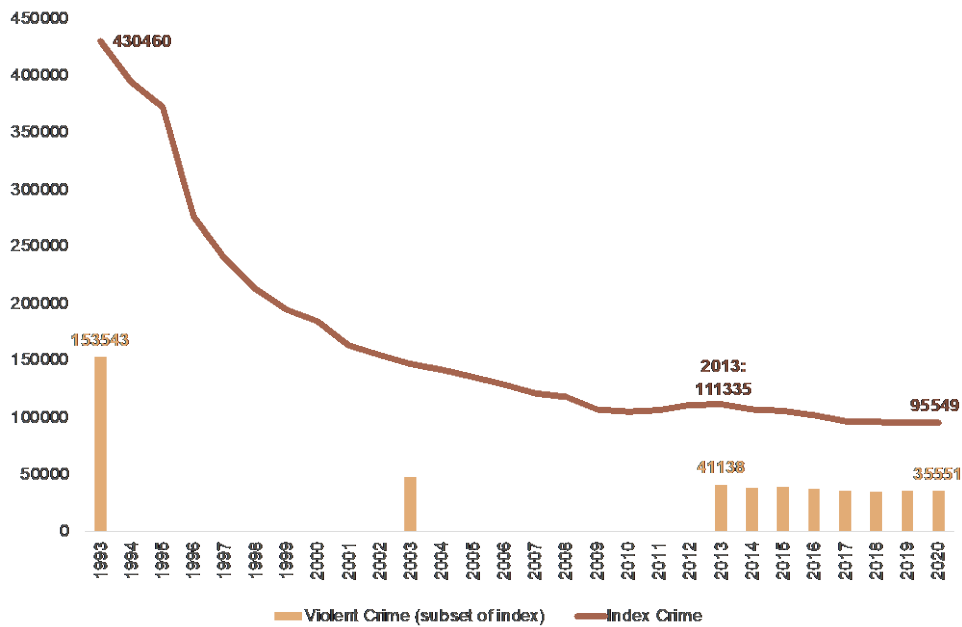


Figure 10: Index crime and violent crime in New York City



With the weaknesses of the old system on display for all to see, the fiscal crisis fortifies the notion that it is unthinkable and undoable to continue as we have. Below are recommendations on how to complete the turn New York City has already started for a successful civic model of safety and economic well-being.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NEXT MAYOR: BUILD A THRIVING CITY, DO NOT ONLY REDUCE CRIME

These recommendations focus on enhancing the city’s ability to make disciplined, coordinated, data-informed decisions that effectively achieve stated goals. These focus on process because the absence of a coordinated approach, driven by an open examination of information and data, has been the single largest obstacle to identifying solutions and executing upon them. Without setting a goal and creating a plan to achieve the goal, government simply monitors trends, buffeted to action by the latest news cycle. This discipline in goal setting and reaching is particularly important among the criminal justice agencies, surely because the stakes are life and death, but also because decision-making is spread across the city (police, jails, probation), state (courts, prison, and parole) and independent actors (judges and district attorneys). With no one “boss,” a regular way of convening, and promoting a common and cool-headed understanding of the facts is crucial to finding solutions to the hard problems. Because these issues have their provenance, and thus solutions, outside the justice system, it is important that a leader, a civilian deputy mayor for justice, have both the personal gravitas and formal authority to mobilize, convene, cajole, and execute.



APPOINT A CIVILIAN DEPUTY MAYOR FOR JUSTICE POLICY AND OPERATIONS

Every key portfolio in the city – housing, health and human services, operations – has a deputy mayor who oversees and supports the agencies responsible for operations, and who sets policy and coordinates inside and outside the city agency infrastructure. Except the justice agencies. Here, the police department, by charter reports directly to the mayor, the other agencies to an assortment of deputy mayors. Yet this area, perhaps more than any other area needs true civilian oversight, support and coordination in real-time. This cannot be the mayor himself who does not (and should not) spend the amount of time required every day to understand or personally solve, for example, what’s driving the crises at Rikers or how the police department is deployed or is deploying force. Because in American democracy we have, for good reason, chosen civilian government, the deputy mayor level oversight, even of uniform agencies, should be a person with deep civilian roots – for example, a judge, lawyer or policy and operations expert – with a granular understanding of the operations of the justice system and the social determinants of crime. Because the issues that affect New Yorkers’ safety and well-being cross many portfolios, the deputy mayor must be someone who brings both personal stature and formal authority to connect as an equal with other deputy mayors and OMB director.

The first question that the city, together with community members, must ask and answer is: what is the criminal justice system for? What should they do alone, with others or not at all? These questions and the answers to them are foundational to implementing effective, consistent, and nimble solutions. Getting the answers can be achieved in any number of ways – 100-day commission that sets the plan with regular accountability to follow it; using some of the structures suggested here or another method. While answering these questions will frame the solutions, the process of getting there will need to account for and address the fatigue of residents who have been asked these questions sporadically over the years without resolution. The criminal justice agencies’ budgets, now opaque, must be understood so that the city knows what each agency does and what is produced. Without that, it will not be possible to make rational and effective decisions about any realignment of function or budget.

Functions:

- Oversee functionally the day-to-day operations of mayoral criminal justice agencies and criminal justice adjacent agencies (police, Correction, Probation, MOCJ, ENDGBV).
- Ensure the regular and open display of data, describing, factually, how the criminal justice system is operating. This is a basic democracy project: absence of this forthright display has encouraged, for example, a highly politicized narrative about who is at fault for the shooting rise, obscuring the already difficult task of identifying the causes so that solutions can be found.
- Coordinate policy with the non-mayoral criminal justice agencies that the city funds (district attorneys and defenders) as well as other important players in the justice system such as the court system, non-profits running alternatives to detention and incarceration, crisis management and other programs, with data on performance publicly available.



- Coordinate with non-criminal justice agencies to achieve intersecting goals. One of the prominent and critical non-criminal justice system intersections is with mental health: the city is already working on who responds and what they do when a person is in crisis. This work must be accelerated and amplified. In addition, addressing the issues driving cycles of jail, shelter and hospital use is key to disrupting those cycles. There is good evidence that supportive housing has an impact on all three by stabilizing lives.⁴⁵
- Provide an accessible decision-maker to community organizations and residents to ensure the effective delivery of resources related to safety. [Elsewhere](#), I have suggested that the Neighborhood stats report the issues to the Deputy Mayor for Justice, through Assistant Mayors in each borough responsible for bringing together and expediting solutions among the city agencies.

Day to day work with the agencies will permit better real time consultation and direction on an array of important issues, including how and when the police department uses force.

STRUCTURE

Staff: MOCJ should provide the primary staffing to the Deputy Mayor for Justice, making available and transparent regular information about justice system operations and effect, results of work by contracted partners, including re-entry, alternatives to detention and incarceration programs and crisis management programs. MOCJ should also be the primary organizer to identify, synthesize and disseminate new ideas from the field, government and the academy that will help inform and develop key strategies.

Justice coordinating council: Run a regular weekly meeting with key criminal justice decision makers, informed by current data that all participants have access to, to illuminate and anticipate where operational issues are occurring and where the fair operation of the system is failing. This kind of regular, disciplined and data-grounded conference would have anticipated and avoided many of the issues we now see reaching crisis point at Rikers. Similarly, a focused and cooperative look at the data is the path to understanding what is driving the shooting spike.

Deputy Mayors' Vital City Cabinet: Because so many of the issues require the attention of agencies outside the justice portfolio e. g. Sanitation, Parks, Transportation, NYCHA, but affect the operations of those agencies, the Deputy Mayors who oversee the relevant agencies should meet on a weekly basis, to ensure the goals set (see below) are being met, voices of residents heard directly, impediments moved as quickly as possible and a clear and joint understanding of next steps is implemented.

SET CITYWIDE AND NEIGHBORHOOD-SPECIFIC GOALS

Reflecting the intersecting drivers of prosperity and public safety **and establish accountability mechanisms across multiple city agencies** for tracking progress against these goals with a focus on the



approximately 15 neighborhoods with historically elevated levels of crime and other manifestations of social distress.

- Within the criminal justice system: shrink justice system uses to the irreducible minimum.
- Use the Coordinating Council to set common goals and organize data, resources and attention to achieve them. Two primary focuses should be:
 1. The reduction of violence, pulling in all the strategies, some centered in police but many not, that can iteratively stop the violence. A detailed plan, mapped over city budget and operations is forthcoming in the January issue of [Vital City](#).
 2. The reduction of the number of people in jail to the lowest number consistent with public safety, described in detail [here](#), showing a path to approximately 2200 people in jail. The number of people in jail is a good bellwether of how well or poorly the justice system is working because the size of the jail population is the result of decisions by police, judges, prosecutors and others and reflects intentional and unintentional policy choices.
 - **Rikers Island closure:** adhere to the commitment to close Rikers but examine closely whether the number of people held can be further reduced and whether, committed still to the 2027 timetable, better facilities at a lower cost could be built. Detailed recommendations [here](#)
 - **Mental health:** currently 17% of the people in city jails are seriously mentally ill. There are many efforts throughout the city focused on how to prevent mental health crisis, who should respond, what should happen upon response, if the mentally ill are jailed what happens then. The structures suggested here would help to elevate and expand what's working and synthesize the different parts of the many systems that touch both criminal justice and mental health.

OUTSIDE THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM, USE TESTED STRUCTURES AND SOLUTIONS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO NEIGHBORHOOD WELL-BEING

Use, deepen and support existing structures that have brought together residents, city agencies, non-profits, and others to identify and solve safety and safety-adjacent issues. The structures listed below already exist in various forms of development and should be incubated, supported, and replicated. The results and concerns produced from these neighborhood-based efforts should feed up in an organized and prompt manner to the DM Vital City Cabinet for resolution of the particular issue and identification of citywide implications:

- **Neighborhoodstat:** expand and deepen this effort which exists in 15 neighborhoods. It brings together residents, agencies, non-profits to focus on addressing the conditions that incubate crime, including dilapidated physical space, lack of employment, among many other issues.
- **Brownsville Safety Alliance (BSA) and the Hub:** The BSA is a set of neighborhood groups working with the police and the district attorney to shift the balance of how safety is secured from sole reliance on the criminal justice system to a default reliance on neighborhood



interventions – with police as the last resort -- ranging from employment to mental health to violence interventions. A central organizing mechanism in development (and fully operational in other cities) is the “Hub” which convenes neighborhood groups and city agencies each week to address specific “conditions” disrupting neighborhood life, whether a person in crisis or a physical location in need of stewardship.

BUY THE MOST WELL-BEING AND SAFETY FOR EVERY DOLLAR SPENT

- Conduct as close to a “zero-based” analysis of the criminal justice agency budgets to understand what functions the budgets are supporting and how effective the investments are.
- On a parallel track, identify the non-justice system approaches – whether programmatic like summer youth employment or infrastructure such as lighting public places – and the impact on safety and well-being when properly organized, funded and deployed.
- Follow the results of these two analyses to Invest more deeply and extensively in strategies that address the underlying causes of crime and disorder centered in other disciplines (for example, neighborhood activation that is rooted in physical change to neighborhoods;⁴⁶ “Becoming a Man” that relies on employment; “SAGA” that reduces crime through algebra tutoring in 9th grade).
- Compare human and fiscal costs in achieving goals by old methods and by new (for example, reducing the number of people who cycle through jail, shelter and hospital by arrest or by supportive housing)
- Use city money to attract a match from philanthropic groups (money that can be more nimbly used than city procurement to obtain needed resources) with a set of common goals, and with a regular accounting as to whether those joint investments are making progress toward the goals. Invite information sharing and develop new vehicles to force-multiply existing but unorganized resources.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE PHYSICAL CITY THROUGH A STANDING TASK FORCE OF AGENCIES THAT REPORT REGULARLY ON PLACE-BASED GOALS AND PROGRESS TO THE DM VITAL CITY CABINET

- **To increase well-being and defeat violence** map places of repeated violence⁴⁷ and devise changes to the physical environment, in partnership with neighborhood residents: Numerous random controlled trials show that design of city blocks and neighborhoods can have outsize effects on crime and quality of life. This has a particular effect in [segregated Black neighborhoods](#) where violence and dilapidation concentrate, the result of years of disinvestment. With the city owning 50-90% of most neighborhoods (roads, firehouses,



libraries, housing developments), it already has a robust capital budget focused on neighborhood improvement. These opportunities should, together with neighborhood input, elicited through Neighborhoodstats, be leveraged for projects that, through design, can, for example, erase invisible gang lines that prevent residents from safe passage or fill public spaces with vibrant community use. A plan for Morrisania and Brownsville, developed with the neighborhood, already exists and has been implemented in part. ⁴⁸

- **To address disorder and fear:** Establish a place-oriented standing task force of city agencies, like Sanitation and Transportation, community organizations and to address quality of life issues with tie ins into existing capital expenditures. This group could stably address the confluence of issues that persistently occur in parts of the city – Times Square or 125th Street and Lexington – and intermittently occur in other places.
- **Focus on deteriorated quality of life as one driver of fear and look beyond police at changing behavior.** For example, a third of all summonses are issued for drinking in public. But those receiving them often do not respond and if they do, face consequences that have little effect on behavior. If the city cares about public drinking – a threshold question – other avenues for effectively changing behavior should be explored, for example, a public campaign to deter the behavior.



ENDNOTES

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- ⁴⁴ Current levels of gun violence, abating since the summer, are on a par with those experienced during the Bloomberg administration and well below the peak of the 1990s. A reminder of how violence fluctuates over time, July 2021 had the fourth lowest number of murders (29) since 1993 when the police department started regularly tracking these statistics. [NYPD August 5, 2021: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/news/p0805a/nypd-citywide-crime-statistics-july-2021>].



This is context, not excuse, as finding the causes of the surge in shootings is the predicate to stopping them. Experts largely agree that, just as we do not know for certain why crime dropped after the 1990 peak, the reasons for the current gun violence spike are also complicated and unclear. [NBER: <https://www.nber.org/digest/jan03/what-reduced-crime-new-york-city> and Brennan Center for Justice: <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/crime-trends-1990-2016>]. The national rise suggests that something is driving gun violence, not simply the hyperlocal changes – like bail reform or jail population reduction – to which some attribute NYC’s shooting increase. [NYC Criminal Justice December 2020: <http://criminaljustice.cityofnewyork.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Whats-behind-the-jail-population-increase-December-2020.pdf> and Gothamist: <https://gothamist.com/news/why-are-shootings-and-murders-rise-nyc>]. Consensus appears to be solidifying around the rising levels of social distress in poor neighborhoods where violence was already concentrated and elevated. [NYU Furman Center (2017): <https://furmancenter.org/thestoop/entry/focus-on-poverty>].

As stabilizing routines, like school, jobs, a trip to the playground vanished during the pandemic, disrupting the regular rhythms of life, cycles of retaliation for slights and beefs – always present and always a driver among people and groups – escalated. The cycles were unbraked, with a dramatic reduction in gun arrests and a sharp decline in residents coming forward as witness, demonstrating how fragile the criminal justice system is as the single response to crime. [The New York Times (August 24, 2021):

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/24/nyregion/nyc-shootings-guns.html> and ABC WSHAS11 (July 12, 2021): <https://www.whas11.com/article/news/crime/louisville-gang-violence-crime-rise-social-media-retaliation/417-6d5dd7c6-16c7-4948-aa9b-910f61c7d448>]

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