



# CRIME IN THE TIME OF COVID:

How Economic Conditions and Policies  
Shape Public Safety in New York City

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January 2023



Center for  
New York City  
Affairs

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Center for New York City Affairs is solely responsible for the content and editorial direction.

The author thanks:

**James Parrott** for his thoughtful partnership, research support, and guidance throughout

**Emil Mella Pablo** for research support

**Brittany Alston, Brenden Beck, Alex Camardelle, William M. Evans, Geert Dhondt, Talib Hudson, Lizzy McNevin, Lina Moe, Tamara Oyola-Santiago, David Stein, and Glenda Williams** for their feedback and insights

Center for New York City Affairs staff **Kristin Morse and Bruce Cory** for editorial assistance

**Isabella Wang** for design and layout. The cover photo is by Michael Balog



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Affairs

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New York City, like many communities in the United States, has experienced an increase in crime since the pandemic began. Meanwhile, New York City is also experiencing a more pronounced and prolonged economic impact from Covid compared to most other large cities and the nation: a slower recovery of pandemic-induced job loss and higher unemployment. These economic challenges provided the impetus for the Center for New York City Affairs to analyze New York City crime and economic data side-by-side, to improve our understanding of the relationship between crime and the economy and inform policymaking in both arenas.

This report analyzes crime and economic data over the past decade and as it relates to established research on these topics. In doing so, it provides much-needed context for today's policy debates. The report identifies the ways in which economic conditions and prosperity can have an impact on criminal activity and public safety. It also offers evidence from New York City's recent past that economic policies can play a role in reducing crime. This evidence is particularly relevant given the economic realities New York City faces today.

## Top findings

### **Experts have found evidence of some relationships between crime and the economy:**

- Inequality, especially concentrated poverty at the neighborhood level, can be a contributing factor for all types of crime.
- Unemployment can be a contributing factor for property crimes, but not for violent crimes. The crime reduction effects of employment are most pronounced for adults and Black and Latinx formerly incarcerated individuals.
- Gun violence has little relationship to economic conditions, but community distress can be a contributing factor to gun violence. Community distress itself can be the result of economic challenges, such as housing instability or inadequate access to food and medical care.
- There is a significant and positive relationship between inflation and property crime rates. When the demand and value of goods – like used cars and car parts – rises, the demand for stolen goods also rises. Inflation that is not accompanied by rising wages leads to reduced purchasing power and can further economic and social distress.

### **Current New York City data shows crime increased during the pandemic, but crime rates are still at historic lows:**

- In New York City, complaints of major property and violent crimes have increased since the start of the pandemic. Property crime complaints have increased slightly more than violent crime complaints. Comparing complaints from 2019 to 2021, property crimes increased 6.1 percent and violent crimes increased 5.3 percent. In 2022, some crimes, particularly some violent crimes like murder, have returned to pre-pandemic levels. Other crimes, primarily property crimes like grand larceny of motor vehicles, are still high compared to pre-pandemic levels.
- Gun violence in New York City spiked in 2020, but it began leveling off by 2021. Preliminary estimates from the NYPD show that shooting incidents declined 17.2 percent in 2022, compared to 2021.
- All crime rates in New York City during the pandemic are low relative to crime rates in the 1980s and 1990s.
- Some crimes, notably shooting incidents, are concentrated in majority-Black and -Latinx neighborhoods, such as much of the Bronx, as well as Central and East Harlem in Manhattan, and Brownsville, Bedford Stuyvesant, and East New York in Brooklyn.

### **Current economic data shows growing inequality by race and neighborhood:**

- New York City's economic recovery from the pandemic is lagging compared to the state and the nation. A slower recovery of pandemic-induced lost jobs has resulted in higher unemployment rates. Before the pandemic, both New York City and the nation had a 3.7 percent unemployment rate. By December 2022, the U.S. unemployment rate was lower than before the pandemic, while New York City's was 60 percent higher at 5.9 percent.
- The economic recovery from the pandemic has been unequal. Black and Latinx workers are experiencing higher rates of unemployment than other groups. In the third fourth of 2022, 12.5 percent of Black workers looking for a job could not find one, compared to 2.6 percent of white workers. Young males ages 18-to-24 are also experiencing their lowest employment rates since the Great Recession.
- Prior to the pandemic, poverty was heavily concentrated in some majority-Black and -Latinx neighborhoods, such as much of the Bronx, East Harlem in Manhattan and Brownsville in Brooklyn.

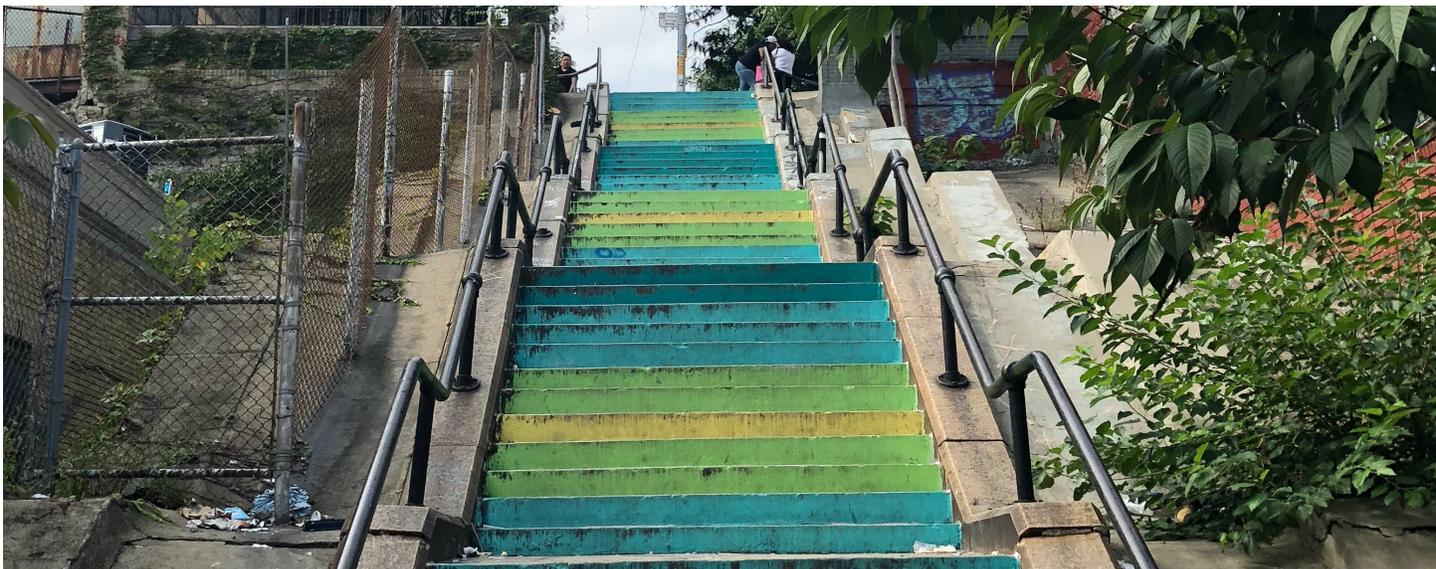
### **The decade prior to the pandemic was a period of steadily declining crime in New York City. It was also a period when:**

- Unemployment rates were at historic lows, which had a positive impact on all demographic groups by race, age, and gender.
- New York State passed legislation to double the minimum wage. Prior to 2014, the minimum wage in New York City was \$7.25. By 2019, it was \$15.
- Inequality declined for two main reasons. First, economic policies such as the increased minimum wage boosted wages for the bottom half of the city's income distribution. Second, even as more money was going to workers, less money was going the top one percent of earners in New York City, whose share of total income stabilized for the first time in decades.

# Conclusions:

Certain economic policies have been effective at reducing crime in recent New York City history and should be intentionally integrated into crime reduction and prevention policy in the city today. Drawing on evidence from experts in the field, recent city history, and current city data, this report concludes with five key takeaways:

1. **Comprehensive economic policy is needed to help prevent and reduce crime.**
2. **Black and Latinx workers, not just young New Yorkers, need access to better jobs and skill development opportunities.**
3. **Continued expansion of New York City's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) should focus on skill-building.**
4. **Stabilizing and increasing affordability of housing is key for reducing crime.**
5. **Policymakers must avoid repeating past mistakes of a "policing and incarceration" approach to crime.**



# INTRODUCTION

Crime has been top of mind for New Yorkers in recent years. In a December 2022 Siena College Research Institute poll, New Yorkers selected crime as their second-highest priority for Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature.<sup>1</sup> (The cost of living was the top priority.)

Crime, crime policy, and media coverage of crime were heavily debated in the 2022 midterm elections in New York. Many politicians and much of the media fixated on the state's recent reform of cash bail requirements as the culprit in New York's recent crime spike. This, despite the fact that the data are clear that the 2019 bail reform law did not cause New York's pandemic-era increase in crime and gun violence.<sup>2</sup>

During the pandemic, many types of crime have been rising across the country in all types of communities: urban and rural, and in Republican- and Democratic-led cities and states alike. Preliminary analysis from researchers at Johns Hopkins University shows homicides involving guns increased nationally by 45 percent from 2019 to 2021,<sup>3</sup> making 2021 rates the highest documented since 1993.<sup>4</sup> Compared to other major cities, New York's increased shooting incidents per 100,000 residents are comparatively low. Therefore, while this report offers analysis specific to New York City, the recent crime increase is not a uniquely New York City phenomenon. If anything, it is a pandemic phenomenon.

Beyond its profound health impacts, the pandemic has had powerful consequences for society and the economy. Some of these impacts appeared short-term – resolved by reopening the economy and bringing people back together. Some are persistent to this day, like the disproportionate number of young people and Black and Latinx workers still unable to find work.

Other impacts are harder to measure, such as pandemic-related trauma, mental health challenges, and the erosion of social cohesion, which have been widely cited as underlying factors for many societal challenges – including crime – across the

<sup>1</sup> Siena College Research Institute, "By Wide Margins, Voters Say Hochul Did Not Make Progress on Several 2022 Goals: Making Communities Safer; Enhancing Trust in State Govt.; Transforming SUNY to Envy of Nation; Making NY Place to Live, Not Leave," December 13, 2022, <https://scri.siena.edu/2022/12/13/by-wide-margins-voters-say-hochul-did-not-make-progress-on-several-2022-goals-making-communities-safer-enhancing-trust-in-state-govt-transforming-suny-to-envy-of-nation-making-ny-place-to-live/>

<sup>2</sup> "NYC Bail Trends Since 2019," Office of the New York City Comptroller Brad Lander, accessed January 4, 2023, <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/nyc-bail-trends-since-2019/>.

<sup>3</sup> Roni Caryn Rabin, "Gun-Related Suicides and Killings Continued to Rise in 2021, C.D.C. Reports," The New York Times, October 6, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/06/health/guns-homicides-suicides-cdc.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas R. Simon et al., "Notes from the Field: Increases in Firearm Homicide and Suicide Rates — United States, 2020–2021," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 71, no. 40 (October 7, 2022): 1286–87, <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7140a4>.

world today. Inequality is a shared culprit of many of these impacts: unequal access to occupational safety, to affordable and stable living conditions, to health care. These complex and layered effects of the pandemic present challenges to understanding the current moment. They also demand that we conduct in-depth analysis of data to identify underlying causes and dynamics of social and economic problems in order to determine effective, appropriate policy responses.

The ongoing political and policy debates about crime have prompted the Center for New York City Affairs (CNYCA) to conduct an analysis of crime statistics alongside our ongoing analysis of economic data. The goal: to gain a better understanding of the relationship between crime and the economy and inform policymaking in both arenas. Addressing the economic causes of crime can help stop crime before it starts, whereas, traditionally, most policing has been after-the-fact, or reactive. Additionally, decades of research provide ample evidence of the ineffectiveness of police and carceral responses to crime.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, there is an acute need to identify alternative responses to crime that do not repeat the harms of past policies.

New York City's lagging economic recovery, with its disproportionate impact on low-income households, demonstrates that more government action is needed to increase the availability and quality of jobs in the city and to reduce economic inequality. That government action will likely be targeted to specific demographic groups, communities, and industries. Understanding the economy's relationship to other social issues, like crime, is critical.

There are many factors that influence criminal activity – some economic, but many not. This report focuses on the economic factors specifically, drawing on CNYCA's expertise and prior research. The report also references recent policy initiatives aimed at other factors, as needed.

This report is organized in five sections. Sections 1 and 2 present recent New York City crime and economic data to provide an overview of where the city stands today. Section 3 draws on established empirical research and our own analysis of New York City data to offer insight on the most relevant connections among crime, economic hardship, and inequality for the present moment. Section 4 discusses the effectiveness of predominant criminal justice policies, like incarceration and policing, and how they interact with the economy. Section 5 concludes with five recommendations of how economic policy can be designed and enacted in the city and state to reduce and prevent crime today.

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Tonry, "Why Crime Rates Are Falling throughout the Western World Why Crime Rates Fall and Why They Don't," *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research* 43 (2014): 1–64.

# 1. NEW YORK CITY CRIME DATA



## An Overview

This overview focuses on shooting incidents, major crimes, and transit crimes – all high visibility, high impact crimes, some of which have attracted heightened attention during the pandemic. NYPD complaint data is analyzed here to get a consistent sense of crime trends and how they have changed over time.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> There is no crime dataset that provides a complete picture of crime. Arrest and conviction rates are well documented to be racially biased.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, crime complaint data is also skewed. While property crime is more common than violent crime, crime victims surveyed by the Bureau of Justice Statistics only report about 40 percent of violent crimes and 32 percent of property crimes annually.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the New York Police Department's (NYPD) complaint data, which is compiled from any reports made to the NYPD, is missing a disproportionate number of property crimes, compared to violent crimes.

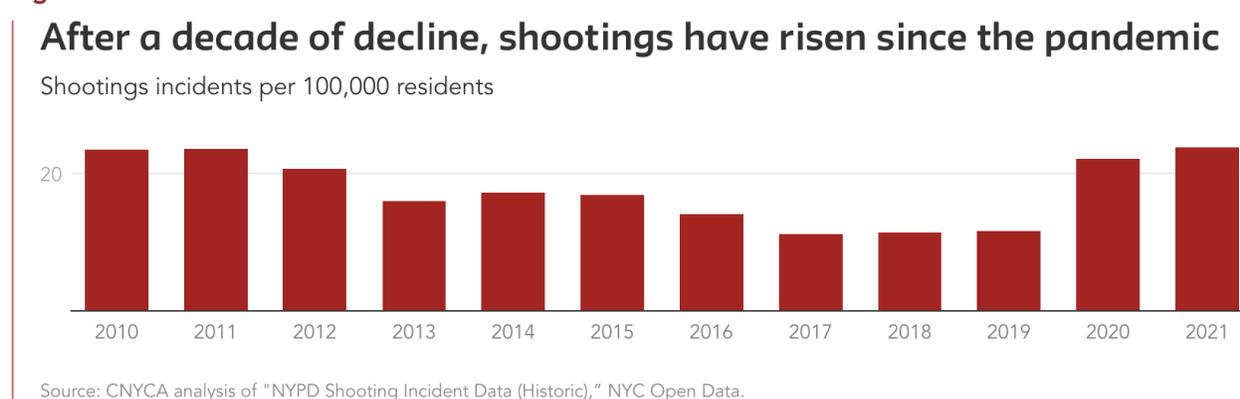
<sup>7</sup> Radley Balko, "Opinion | There's Overwhelming Evidence That the Criminal Justice System Is Racist. Here's the Proof.," *Washington Post*, June 10, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/opinions/systemic-racism-police-evidence-criminal-justice-system/>; Laura Bronner, "Why Statistics Don't Capture The Full Extent Of The Systemic Bias In Policing," *Five ThirtyEight* (blog), June 25, 2020, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/why-statistics-dont-capture-the-full-extent-of-the-systemic-bias-in-policing/>.

<sup>8</sup> John Gramlich, "What the Data Says (and Doesn't Say) about Crime in the United States," *Pew Research Center* (blog), November 20, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/11/20/facts-about-crime-in-the-u-s/>.

# Shootings

While shooting incidents in New York City have risen compared to pre-pandemic levels, recent trends suggest this increase may have peaked. Figure 1 shows that shooting incidents were on a steady decline from 2010 to 2019 and were at a stable and historic low of 11 incidents per 100,000 residents from 2017 to 2019. After these historic declines, gun violence spiked in 2020, but began leveling off by 2021. Preliminary estimates from the NYPD show that shooting incidents declined 17.2 percent in 2022, compared to 2021.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, while New York City is still experiencing higher shooting rates compared to the historically low pre-pandemic levels, these rates are continuing to decrease. Furthermore, while during the pandemic shooting incidents per 100,000 residents have returned to levels last seen in 2010, these rates are still much lower than peak levels in the 1980s and 1990s.

Figure 1



In recent years, shooting incidents in New York City have been concentrated in certain neighborhoods. Figure 2 illustrates the number of shooting incidents in 2021 and through the first three quarters of 2022 per 100,000 residents in each community district. Many majority-Black and -Latinx neighborhoods have borne the brunt of this recent gun violence crisis. These neighborhoods include the majority of the Bronx, as well as Central and East Harlem in Manhattan, and Brownsville, Bedford Stuyvesant, and East New York in Brooklyn.

Compared to other major cities, New York City's increase in shooting incidents is comparatively low.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps not coincidentally, strict gun laws are correlated with fewer firearm-related deaths,<sup>11</sup> including homicides, nationwide, and New York State

<sup>9</sup> "NYPD Announces Citywide Crime Statistics for December 2022," The official website of the City of New York, January 5, 2023, <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/news/p00071/nypd-citywide-crime-statistics-december-2022>.

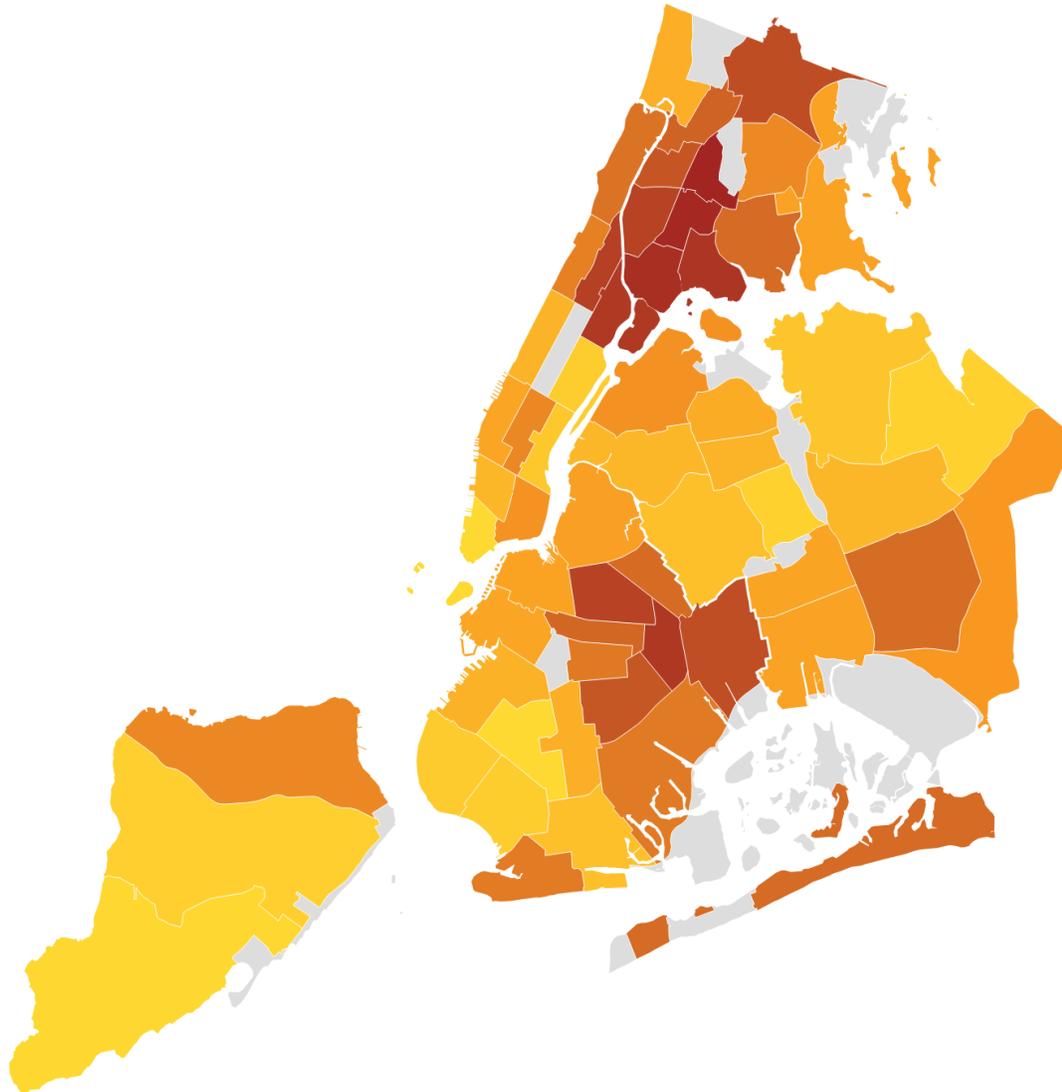
<sup>10</sup> Office of the Public Advocate Jumaane D. Williams, "Reimagining Gun Violence Prevention and Public Safety for New York City," September 2022, <https://www.pubadvocate.nyc.gov/reimagining-gun-violence-prevention-and-public-safety-new-york-city/>.

<sup>11</sup> Carol Sanchez et al., "A Systematic Review of the Causes and Prevention Strategies in Reducing Gun Violence in the United States," *American Journal of Emergency Medicine* 38 (2020): 2169–78.

Figure 2

## Shooting incidents have been highly concentrated in specific neighborhoods in 2021 and 2022

Shootings per 100,000 community district residents



Source: CNYCA analysis of "NYPD Shooting Incident Data (Historic)" and "NYPD Shooting Incident Data (Year to Date)," NYC Open Data.

has both tough firearms regulations and also one of the lowest rates of guns sold per adult.<sup>12</sup>

However, gun sales across the country have been on the rise in recent years, and New York State is consistent with this trend. Nationally, while gun sales declined in 2021 compared to 2020, both of these years saw the highest number of gun sales since

<sup>12</sup> "Guns in the U.S. – 2021 Second-Highest Year for Gun Sales Since 2000," SafeHome.org, February 16, 2022, <https://www.safehome.org/data/firearms-guns-statistics/>.

2000. New York State experienced a 270 percent increase in gun sales comparing 2002 to 2020; however, the state saw a 12 percent decline in gun sales between 2020 and 2021.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, while New York City's shooting incidents are low compared to other major cities, there is reason to be concerned about increased gun sales in recent years. The City and State are already pursuing many effective policy responses by targeting gun trafficking and enforcing the State's existing gun laws. The State's Interstate Task Force on Illegal Guns<sup>14</sup> and the City's passage of recent bills targeting the so-called "Iron Pipeline" of interstate gun-running and gun traffickers<sup>15</sup> are important steps in increasing the efficacy of strict gun laws in New York.

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<sup>13</sup> "Guns in the U.S. – 2021 Second-Highest Year for Gun Sales Since 2000."

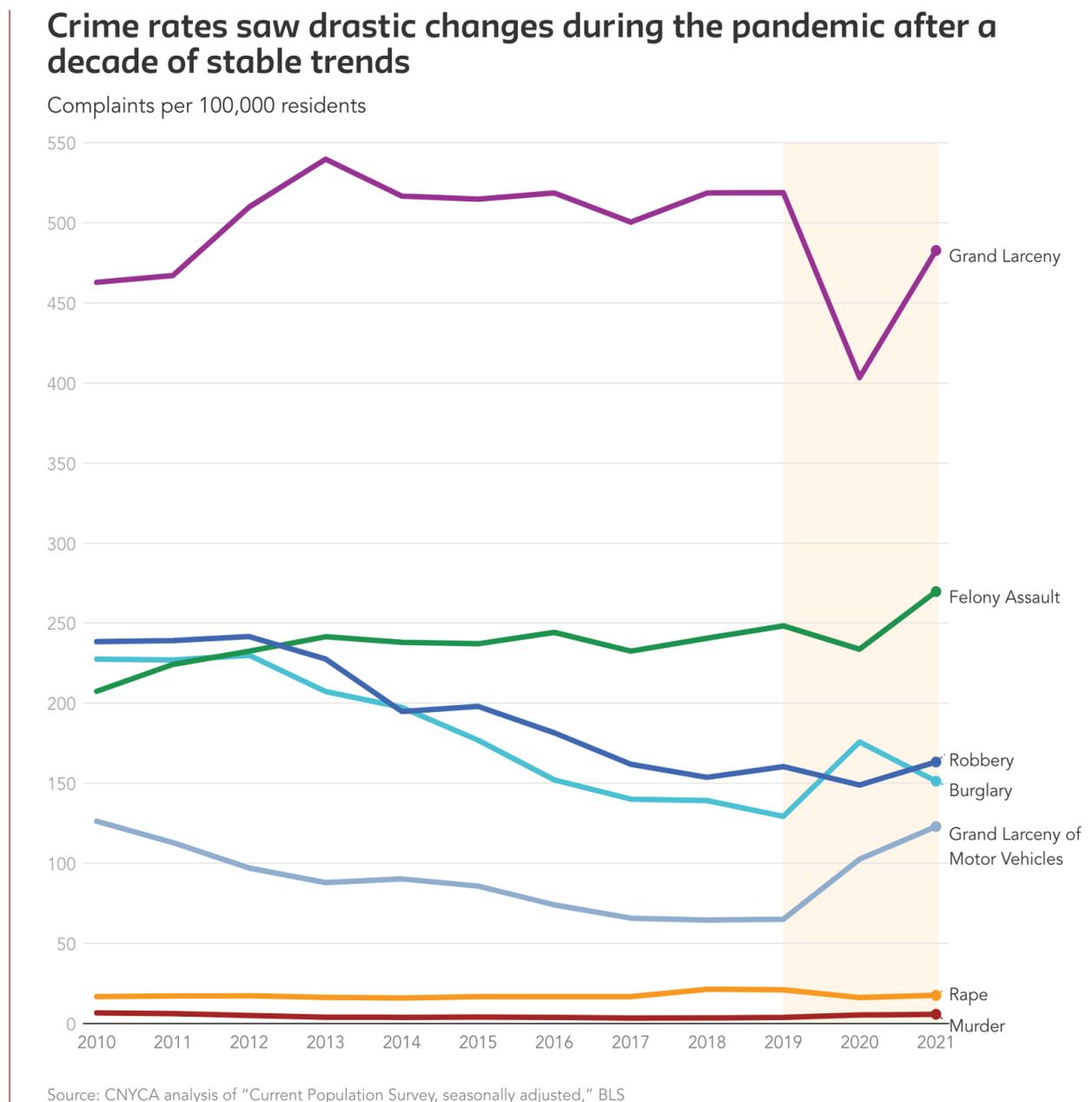
<sup>14</sup> "Governor Hochul Announces Successful Start to Interstate Task Force on Illegal Guns," New York State, April 8, 2022, <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-announces-successful-start-interstate-task-force-illegal-guns>.

<sup>15</sup> "Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams Signs Two Bills To Dam Additional Rivers Feeding Sea Of Gun Violence," City of New York, October 11, 2022, <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/737-22/transcript-mayor-eric-adams-signs-two-bills-dam-additional-rivers-feeding-sea-gun-violence>.

# Major Crimes

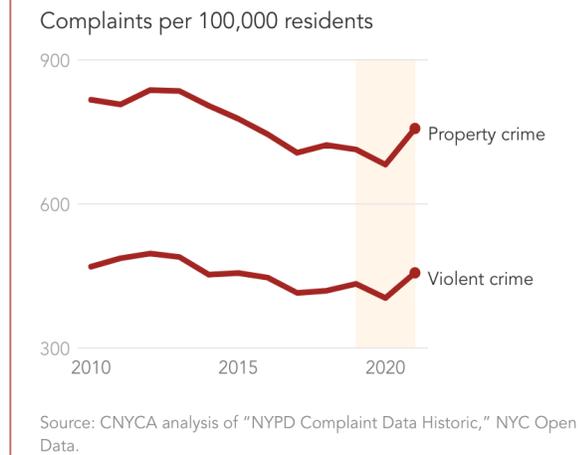
Figure 3 shows crimes reported to the police in recent history on the seven major felonies tracked closely by the NYPD, which comprise high-level property and violent offenses. Figure 4 aggregates these complaints into property complaints – including grand larceny, burglary, and grand larceny of motor vehicle – and violent crime complaints – including felony assault, robbery, rape, and murder. Different crimes are correlated with different social and economic conditions, which are detailed in Section 3 of this report.

**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**

### Property and violent crimes were steadily declining prior to the pandemic



In evaluating the trends of major felonies, then, it is not surprising that some were steadily increasing while others were steadily decreasing from 2010 to 2019. What Figure 3 does illustrate, however, is the slow and steady change in complaints for each crime during this time before the pandemic. There are no dramatic spikes or changes in the number of complaints from year to year. With the exception of grand larceny, which is the theft of property valued at over \$1,000, all other property crimes were on a steady decline from 2010-2019. Figure 4 further illustrates how both property (and, to a lesser degree, violent crime complaints) were steadily declining for years before

the pandemic. Both property and violent crime complaints have increased since the start of the pandemic; however, property crime complaints have increased slightly more than violent crime complaints.

While the total number of murders and rape reported are too small to see visually in Figure 3, complaints of murder, one of the most well-reported crimes, were on a steady decline during this time period. From 2010 to 2019, the rate declined by 47 percent. Complaints of rape, one of the least-reported major crimes, were relatively stable until an increase in 2017. Between 2018 and 2017, complaints of rape increased 27 percent – from 17 to 21 complaints per 100,000 residents.<sup>16</sup> Given the low complaint rates of this crime, it is unclear how much this rise reflects an increase in rape itself or how the #MeToo movement, which went viral in 2017, encouraged more reporting of this crime.

After a period of largely slow, steady, and consistent trends in complaints of major crimes, many crime rates illustrated in Figure 3 show a more dramatic change once the pandemic began. Most notably, grand larceny plummeted in 2020 and then returned to levels largely consistent with pre-pandemic levels. Roughly 30 percent of grand larceny complaints are for credit card fraud and identity theft and it was these types of crimes that drove the decline in grand larceny complaints in 2020.<sup>17</sup> It is likely that the plummet in grand larceny complaints made by New Yorkers in 2020 is related to how numerous people committing these crimes were focusing their energy on targeting federal and state pandemic relief funds in 2020.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> "NYPD Complaint Data Historic." NYC Open Data, accessed October 25, 2022, <https://data.cityofnyc.gov/Public-Safety/NYPD-Complaint-Data-Historic/qgea-i56i>.

<sup>17</sup> "NYPD Complaint Data Historic."

<sup>18</sup> Ken Dilanian and Laura Strickler, "Theft from the Covid Relief Plan Known as PPP Was Even Worse than We Thought," NBC News, March 28, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/justice-department/biggest-fraud-generation-looting-covid-relief-program-known-ppp-n1279664>; Niraj Chokshi, "Pandemic Unemployment Fraud Estimate Rises to \$45.6 Billion," The New York Times, September 22, 2022, sec. Business, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/22/business/unemployment-insurance-fraud-pandemic.html>.

After years of steady declines, other property crimes increased in 2020. Burglary complaints spiked in 2020 and then returned to pre-pandemic levels by 2021. Complaints of grand larceny of motor vehicles, another one of the most well-reported crimes, also reversed trend and began rising in 2020. However, unlike burglaries, they have continued to rise at a consistent rate.

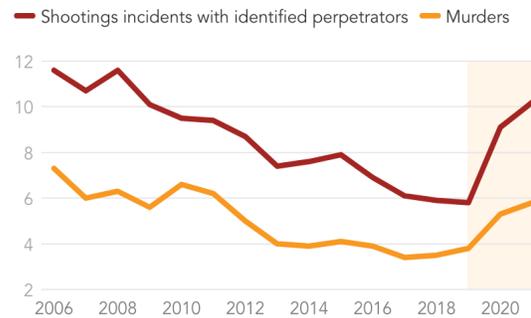
Trends for violent crimes also changed dramatically at the onset of the pandemic. The rate of felony assaults has not changed trend (it continues to rise), but the rate in 2021 rose faster than any previous year this decade. Figure 3 makes it clear that the pandemic has had a huge impact on criminal activity. Figure 4 highlights that the pandemic has had its most pronounced impact on property crime. While some of those impacts seem to be short-term, like the change in burglary and grand larceny complaints in 2020, other crimes reflect an ongoing impact of the pandemic. Data for 2022 is incomplete at this time; however, preliminary estimates from the NYPD show that five of the seven major crimes – all but felony assault and grand larceny of motor vehicle – declined in 2022 compared to 2021.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, New York City continues to experience elevated crime rates compared to before the pandemic, but the rates of most crimes described here are falling.

Murder rates saw a 50 percent increase from 2019 to 2021.<sup>20</sup> Preliminary analysis from the NYPD, however, show that murder rates returned to 2019 levels in 2022.<sup>21</sup> Figure 5 highlights the change in murder complaints more closely. Examining murder complaints over a longer period of time shows they closely correlate with shooting incidents with a known perpetrator. Therefore, while both shooting incidents and murders experienced a dramatic increase during the pandemic, the rise in gun sales at this time also plays a significant role in the increased murder rates. Many of the same policies to curb gun access, such as the State’s Interstate Task Force on Illegal Guns and the City’s passage of bills targeting the Iron Pipeline and gun traffickers, may also be effective in bringing murder rates down.

**Figure 5**

### Increased murder rates in recent years coincide with a rise in gun violence

Complaints per 100,000 residents



Source: CNYCA analysis of “NYPD Complaint Data Historic” and “NYPD Shooting Incident Data (Historic),” NYC Open Data.

<sup>19</sup> “NYPD Announces Citywide Crime Statistics for December 2022.”

<sup>20</sup> “NYPD Complaint Data Historic.”

<sup>21</sup> “NYPD Announces Citywide Crime Statistics for December 2022.”

# Transit Crimes

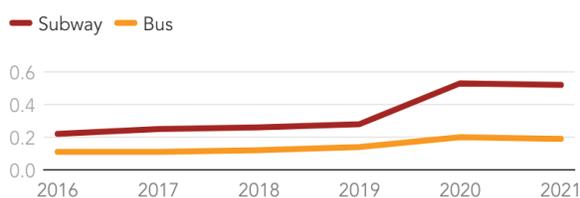
Concerns about increased crime on transit has taken center stage in public safety conversations this year. It is challenging to analyze the data on transit crime complaints as it relates to pre-pandemic periods because the ridership levels have declined and fluctuated so much throughout the pandemic. Recent data show transit crime rates are declining as riders return to the subway. The total number of transit crime complaints has been much lower than pre-pandemic levels when analyzing complaints as they relate to the total population of New York City.<sup>22</sup> For example, subway crime complaints per 100,000 residents were 32 percent lower in 2020 compared to 2019. Figure 6 shows crime complaints per rider were increasing before the pandemic on buses and the subway, though there is no clear explanation for this increase. Transit crime complaints have dramatically increased during the pandemic. However, given extremely low ridership levels in 2020 and 2021, it is unclear if this analysis tells us more about low ridership or high crime complaints.

To account for this, Figure 7 compares complaints per rider during comparable pandemic time periods in the years 2020 through 2022. Since we only have available data through September 2022, each year only includes data through September. Months of high ridership in January and February before the pandemic in 2020 are also removed from 2020 as well as all other years in the analysis. Comparing the same months (March to September) in each year, we see total crime complaints per rider have been on the decline as more riders return to the subway system. Therefore, while there have been some horrific and high-profile assaults on the subway during the pandemic, the subway is not rife with criminal activity compared to pre-pandemic years. Given Mayor Eric Adams's increased spending on policing the subway system, it is important to continue carefully monitoring transit complaints to determine the appropriate level of public spending on this intervention compared to others.

**Figure 6**

## Transit crime complaints per annual ridership has risen during the pandemic

Complaints per 100,000 annual riders



Source: CNYCA analysis of "Reports: Transit-Bus Crime," NYPD; "Day-by-Day Ridership Numbers," MTA.

**Figure 7**

## Subway crime complaints per rider are declining as more people return to the subway

Complaints per 100,000 riders March to September



Source: CNYCA analysis of "Reports: Transit-Bus Crime," NYPD; "Day-by-Day Ridership Numbers," MTA.

<sup>20</sup> "Reports: Transit-Bus Crime," NYPD, accessed October 25, 2022, <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/stats/reports-analysis/transit-bus.page>; "Day-by-Day Ridership Numbers," MTA, accessed October 25, 2022, <https://new.mta.info/coronavirus/ridership>.

## 2. THE NEW YORK CITY ECONOMY

The Covid pandemic brought about the steepest job loss in U.S. history.<sup>23</sup> The total number of jobs in the U.S. economy has now surpassed pre-pandemic levels.<sup>24</sup> However, the economic recovery has not been equitable by region or for workers given their race, gender, age, or level of education. While nationally the unemployment rate is roughly back to pre-pandemic levels, New York State's and New York City's economic recovery from the pandemic has been slower and is thus far incomplete.

Figure 8 provides a comparison of unemployment rates pre-pandemic and to December 2022 at the national, state, and city level. At the outset of the pandemic, the New York City and national unemployment rates were the same, while New York State's was 0.2 percentage points higher. The national unemployment rate is now lower than before the pandemic. New York State is inching closer to its pre-pandemic unemployment rate. In New York City, on the other hand, it is 60 percent higher than it was before the pandemic

Figure 8

### NYC's pandemic employment recovery is lagging compared to the U.S. and State

Unemployment rate



Source: CNYCA analysis of "Current Population Survey, seasonally adjusted," BLS.

History provides ample evidence of the disproportionate impact recessions have on low-income households and Black and Latinx people.<sup>25</sup> This dynamic can be attributed to the racism embedded in U.S. society. Racial discrimination in the labor market often means that non-white workers are the last to be hired. During a recession when companies lay off workers, managers often lay off the most recently hired employees,

<sup>23</sup> Rakesh Kochhar, "How U.S. Unemployment during COVID-19 Compares with Great Recession | Pew Research Center," *Pew Research Center* (blog), June 11, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/11/unemployment-rose-higher-in-three-months-of-covid-19-than-it-did-in-two-years-of-the-great-recession/>.

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, All Employees, Total Nonfarm [PAYEMS], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, accessed December 7, 2022, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/PAYEMS>.

<sup>25</sup> Aaronson, Stephanie R., Mary C. Daly, William L. Wascher, and David W. Wilcox. 2019. "Okun Revisited: Who Benefits Most from a Strong Economy?" *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* 2019, no. 1 (March): 333–404. <https://www.brookings.edu/bpea-articles/okunrevisited-who-benefits-most-from-a-strong-economy/>.

which disproportionately impacts workers of color. Therefore, while there are persistent differences in the unemployment rates by race, where white workers consistently have a lower unemployment rate than other groups at any given time,<sup>26</sup> these differences are exacerbated due to company layoff policies during recessions.

Covid’s direct influence on the economy has led to an even greater employment disparity for workers of color. Not only have these racially discriminatory general dynamics disproportionately fallen on workers of color, but certain industries where Black, Latinx, and low-income workers are highly represented faced the most severe and persistent economic impacts of the pandemic.

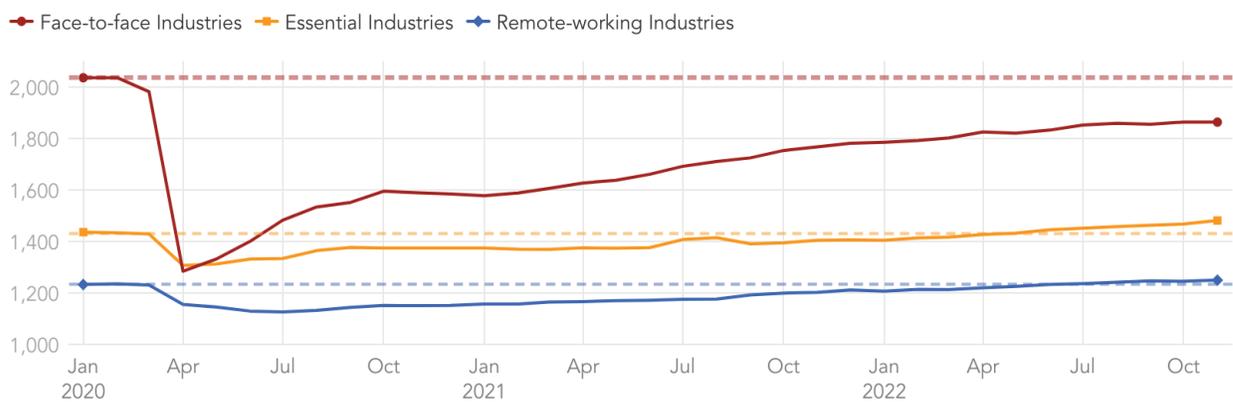
The government’s shutdown of the economy in the early days of the pandemic had a stronger and more long-lasting effect on certain face-to-face industries – like retail, food service, education, and construction. Meanwhile, essential industries, like health and government services, were expected to increase their work throughout the pandemic. Industries that were able to transition to remote work were more easily able to scale back up after the initial government shutdown of the economy.

Figure 9 highlights the disparity in the loss of jobs in New York City between essential, face-to-face, and remote-working industries. Face-to-face industries are the largest of the three categories, and employed more than two million people before the pandemic. More jobs in face-to-face industries were lost at the onset of the pandemic than in essential and remote-working industries. As of now, essential and remote jobs have returned to the New York City economy; in fact, there are more jobs in those

**Figure 9**

### Face-to-face industries, like retail, have yet to fully recover jobs lost in the pandemic

Thousands of employees in New York City by month and industry group



The dashed lines indicate each corresponding industry group's employment level as of February 2020.

Source: CNYCA analysis of "Current Employment Statistics, seasonally adjusted," BLS.

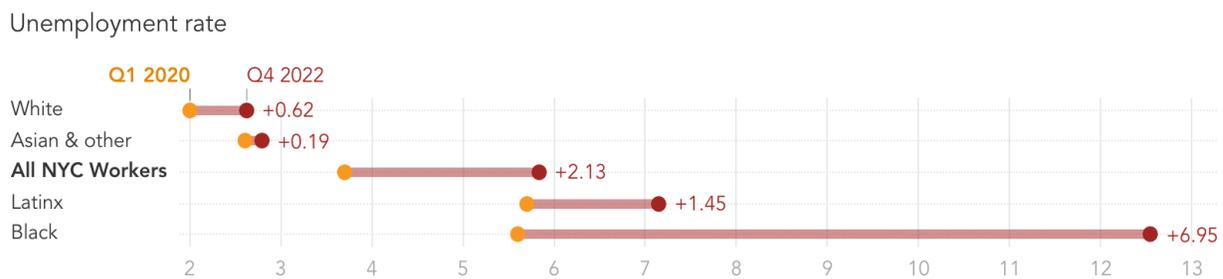
<sup>26</sup> J.W. Mason, Mike Konczal, and Lauren Melodia, "Reimagining Full Employment: 28 Million More Jobs and a More Equal Economy" 2021. Roosevelt Institute, [https://rooseveltinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/RI\\_FullEmployment\\_Brief\\_202107.pdf](https://rooseveltinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/RI_FullEmployment_Brief_202107.pdf).

industries than there were before the pandemic. But those additional jobs do not offset the jobs lost in face-to-face industries that are still missing from New York City's economy. Because Black and Latinx workers and low-income workers have been more represented in the workforce of many face-to-face industries, these job losses have disproportionately impacted these groups.

Workers of color have and continue to bear the brunt of the pandemic's impact on the New York City economy. Figure 10 shows the difference between the unemployment rates of different demographic groups before the pandemic and as of the fourth quarter of 2022. While the unemployment rate in New York City is 60 percent higher than it was before the pandemic, certain groups are facing more extreme levels of unemployment. In the fourth quarter of 2022, 12.5 percent of Black workers looking for a job could not find one, compared to 2.6 percent of white workers. These disparities, if not addressed, can have long-term consequences on people's ability to rejoin the labor force as well as a loss of earnings and worsening of the racial wealth gap.

**Figure 10**

### Pandemic job loss in New York City has disproportionately impacted workers by race



Source: CNYCA analysis of "Current Population Survey, seasonally adjusted," BLS.

There are other economic disparities. First, the pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have led to the highest inflation the U.S. has seen in 40 years. Inflation disproportionately impacts low-income households because they have less income to accommodate rising prices. Furthermore, in response to this high inflation, the Federal Reserve has raised interest rates, which is slowing economic growth and could potentially lead to a recession at a time when New York City is still recovering from the pandemic job falloff. High unemployment among Black and Latinx workers, slower economic growth, and higher prices are problems for the city as a whole. Moreover, the combination of these economic trends, if unaddressed, has the potential to embed further race and income inequality in New York City.

# 3. FIVE WAYS CRIME AND THE ECONOMY INTERACT

## An Overview

There are many factors that influence criminal activity – some economic, but many not. Researchers have been studying the relationship between crime and the economy for decades. To account for differences in local laws, economists in this field often analyze data from hundreds of metropolitan areas over many years. Below is a review of five of the most relevant topics and analysis of how the established empirical research on each topic relates to New York City in this current moment.



# Crime and Employment

New York City is lagging in its employment recovery from the Covid-19 economic downturn compared to the country as a whole. Empirical research demonstrates some specific relationships between crime and employment that are particularly relevant for this moment in New York City.

First, there is the relationship between a person's employment (or unemployment) and their criminal actions. Numerous researchers find that when a person has a job – especially adults ages 35 and older and formerly incarcerated individuals – they are less likely to commit property crimes. On the other hand, having a job does not particularly deter youth from committing property crimes.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, there is no evidence that when a person has a job, they are less likely to commit violent crimes.<sup>28</sup> Researchers have also found that when a person has a low-skill or low-wage job they are actually more likely to be engaged in criminal activity than if they were unemployed. Therefore, the availability and accessibility of good-quality jobs, which at the very least means a permanent job with good pay, is an important deterrent for property crimes.<sup>29</sup>

Second, researchers have explored the relationship between crime rates and unemployment levels. Here, the focus is less on how employment affects an individual's

## What is a good quality job?

There are many factors that make a job “good” or “high” quality instead of “low” quality. In prior research on the relationship between crime and employment, a good-quality job is a permanent job in an industry known for low turnover, good pay, and providing the ability to work full-time. The U.S. Departments of Commerce and Labor recently convened researchers and policy experts to develop a shared vision of what constitutes a good job.<sup>37</sup> The group developed a list of eight factors that define a good job. They include: pay; benefits; job security and working conditions; skill and career advancement; diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility; empowerment and representation; organizational culture; and recruitment and hiring practices. While there is no system in place to measure jobs against these factors at this time, they show that a good-quality job is not just one that is well-compensated, but also one where workers feel safe and respected.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Uggen and Sara Wakefield, “What Have We Learned from Longitudinal Studies of Work and Crime?,” in *The Long View of Crime: A Synthesis of Longitudinal Research*, ed. Akiva M. Liberman (New York, NY: Springer New York, 2008), 191–219, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-71165-2\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-71165-2_6).

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Uggen, “Work as a Turning Point in the Life Course of Criminals: A Duration Model of Age, Employment, and Recidivism,” *American Sociological Review* 65, no. 4 (2000): 529–46, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2657381>.

<sup>29</sup> Eric Gould, Bruce Weinberg, and David Mustard, “Crime Rates and Local Labor Market Opportunities in the United States: 1979-1997,” *Review of Economics and Statistics* 84, no. 1 (2002): 45–61.; Stephen Machin and Costas Meghir, “Crime and Economic Incentives,” *Journal of Human Resources* 39, no. 4 (2004): 958–79.

behavior and more on how living in an environment with high unemployment may be a contributing factor to the criminal activity in the area. Researchers have found that unemployment rates at the city level have little impact on crime; however, neighborhoods with higher unemployment rates are correlated with increased property crime, but not violent crime.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, when formerly incarcerated people – especially Black and Latinx formerly incarcerated people – return to their community after prison, they are less likely to experience reimprisonment if they live in geographic proximity to relevant job opportunities.<sup>31</sup> In this context, relevant job opportunities means that people have the credentials to apply for the job and that the employer is open to hiring people with criminal records.

This research offers important insights for New York City. For example, Figure 3 above shows that certain property crimes, most notably grand larceny of motor vehicles, grand larceny, and burglary, have seen recent upticks during the pandemic. Meanwhile, Figure 8 above shows that, unlike the rest of the country, the city's unemployment rate is still 60 percent above its pre-pandemic rate. High unemployment alongside a recent rise in property crimes is consistent with the literature that shows employment has an impact on property crimes in particular. As a result, economic and labor market policies that create good-quality jobs, and that actively match adults and formerly incarcerated individuals in neighborhoods with high unemployment rates to those jobs, is an effective crime prevention strategy.

Both Mayor Adams and Governor Hochul have already made critical investments in labor market programs that directly align with evidence on how employment can deter crime. These programs offer clear models for expanded labor market policy to mitigate crime. For example, in October 2022, Mayor Adams announced a \$54 million investment to expand the Precision Employment Initiative established by former Mayor Bill de Blasio in 2021. This new program funds the New York City Civilian Climate Corps (CCC),<sup>32</sup> which prioritizes permanently employing adults in neighborhoods facing high crime. BlocPower, a Brooklyn-based climate technology company, manages the CCC. The program provides paid job-readiness and technical training to adults of all ages in a variety of green energy fields, paid on-site internships, and job placement. Over the past year, BlocPower focused its recruitment efforts in the area near three specific police precincts: the 40th and 42nd Precincts in the Bronx (serving Port Morris, Mott Haven, Melrose, and Morrisania); and the 67th Precinct in Brooklyn (serving East Flatbush). As a result, 97 percent of its members are Black and Latinx, 22 percent are formerly incarcerated, and 27 percent have been directly impacted by gun violence. Furthermore, BlocPower has been monitoring gun violence in the communities from which it recruits members. Comparing the first three quarters of 2022 to the first three quarters of 2021, there was a 28 percent decline in gun violence across these three

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<sup>30</sup> Uggen, "Work as a Turning Point in the Life Course of Criminals."

<sup>31</sup> Kevin T. Schnepel, "Good Jobs and Recidivism," *Economic Journal* 128, no. 608 (February 2016): 447–69, <https://doi.org/10.1111/eoj.12415>.

<sup>32</sup> "Mayor Adams, BlocPower Announce Significant Expansion of Precision Employment Initiative to Provide," City of New York, October 20, 2022, <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/762-22/mayor-adams-blocpower-significant-expansion-precision-employment-initiative-provide>.

precincts.<sup>33</sup> Given the early successes of BlocPower, the Precision Employment Initiative is worth expanding to other industries with growth potential in the city's economy, like technology and health services.

The New York State Department of Labor's Gun Violence Prevention Initiative<sup>34</sup> also matches justice-involved individuals and/or residents of neighborhoods that have high gun violence rates with job training and permanent job placement. The Consortium for Worker Education (CWE), a non-profit organization and the workforce development arm of the New York City Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO, runs the New York City component of the Gun Violence Prevention Initiative.<sup>35</sup> CWE works with 20 existing workforce development organizations to provide a wide variety of free educational services, industry-specific training, credentialing, and job placement for 18-to-24-year-olds who are not in school and live in 58 zip codes where increased gun violence has erupted in recent years. By contracting with CWE and its partners that are longstanding organizations in the city's workforce and community development systems, the program connects participants to many industries, rather than being focused on one industry, like the CCC. However, the program could be expanded to maximize its crime deterrence by serving adults of all ages and in priority zip codes experiencing high property crimes in addition to zip codes where there are high rates of gun violence.

Furthermore, Mayor Adams expanded the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) in 2022 in response to rising gun violence. SYEP, a program of the City's Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), provides paid work experience to 14-to-24-year-olds for the summer months.<sup>36</sup> Mayor Adams's historic investment in the program nearly doubled the number of youth able to participate, from 35,198 to 74,884 in 2022.<sup>37</sup> SYEP's successful expansion could also be used as a model to expand other lesser-known DYCD programs that serve youth for longer periods of time, such as Train & Earn, Learn & Earn, and Advance & Earn. These programs offer a mix of education assistance, career readiness training, industry training, and paid internships to high school juniors, high school seniors, and youth who are not working or in school. Combined, these programs served 3,942 youth in 2022.<sup>38</sup> Given high unemployment rates, these other DYCD programs could serve more youth in need with additional dedicated funding.

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<sup>33</sup> "Civilian Climate Corps Year 1 Impact Report." BlocPower, 2022, accessed December 7, 2022, <https://20299415.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/20299415/Civilian%20Climate%20Corps%20Year%201%20Impact%20Report%20%20October%202022.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> "Gun Violence Prevention Initiative," New York State Department of Labor, accessed October 23, 2022, <https://dol.ny.gov/gun-violence-prevention-initiative>.

<sup>35</sup> "Gun Violence Training," Consortium for Worker Education, accessed December 8, 2022, <https://www.cwenet.net/gun-violence-training>.

<sup>36</sup> "Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)," NYC Department of Youth & Community Development, accessed December 8, 2022, <https://www.nyc.gov/site/dycd/services/jobs-internships/summer-youth-employment-program-syep.page>.

<sup>37</sup> James Parrott and L.K. Moe, "NYC's Unsettled Covid-19 Era Labor Market," Center for NYC Affairs, January 2023, <https://www.centernyc.org/reports-briefs/nycs-unsettled-covid-19-era-labor-market>.

<sup>38</sup> Parrott and Moe, "NYC's Unsettled Covid-19 Era Labor Market."

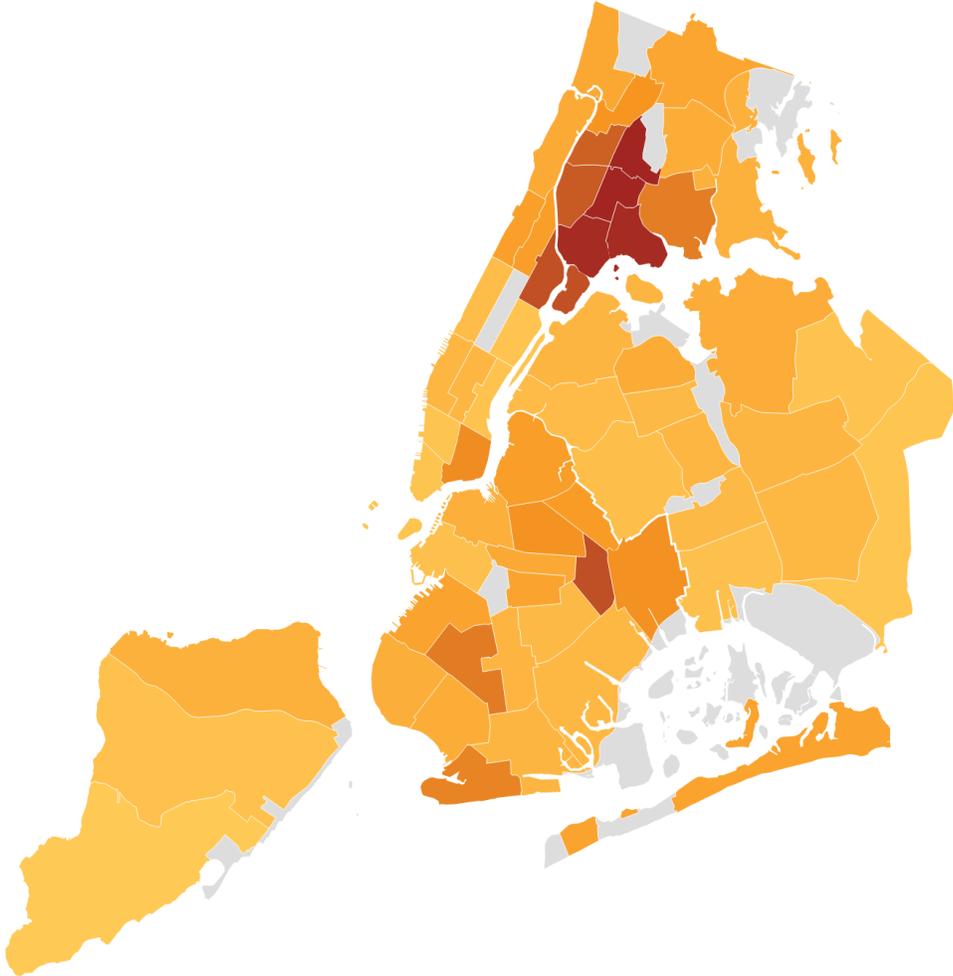
<sup>39</sup> "The Good Jobs Initiative," U.S. Department of Labor, accessed December 7, 2022, <https://www.dol.gov/general/good-jobs/principles>.

# Crime and Inequality

Figure 11

## Poverty is concentrated in specific NYC neighborhoods

Percentage of residents living in poverty, 2019



Source: Source: CNYCA analysis of "Poverty," Citizens Committee for Children of New York.

Numerous studies over the past 40 years find strong and consistent evidence that cities in which there is greater economic inequality have high rates for all types of crime – both property and violent crimes.<sup>40</sup> Economic inequality in these studies is measured in different ways, including a wide gap between poor and average income, the distribution of income across the entire population, and/or concentrated, segregated levels of poverty. This is particularly relevant for New York City today, given the

<sup>40</sup> John Braithwaite, *Inequality, Crime, and Public Policy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979).; J.R. Blau and P.M. Blau, "The Cost of Inequality: Metropolitan Structure and Violent Crime.," *American Sociological Review* 47, no. 114–129 (1982).; Songman Kang, "Inequality and Crime Revisited: Effects of Local Inequality and Economic Segregation on Crime," *Journal of Population Economics* 29 (2016): 593–626.

pandemic's disproportionate impact on job and income loss for low-income workers and workers of color.

The most recent, comprehensive wage data show that economic inequality in New York City is geographically concentrated. In 2019, an estimated 16 percent of New York City residents lived below the federal poverty line.<sup>41</sup> Figure 11 shows the percentage of households in each community district living below the federal poverty line in 2019. In many majority-Black and -Latinx neighborhoods – in the Bronx, East Harlem, and Central Brooklyn – over one-third of residents are living below the federal poverty line. Notably these are also the community districts that faced the highest rates of gun shooting incidents in the city in 2021 and 2022. The pandemic job losses of Black, Latinx, and low-income workers has also contributed to increased poverty in New York City. In 2021, an estimated 18 percent of New York City residents lived below the federal poverty line.<sup>42</sup> The rise in overall poverty rates undoubtedly increased concentrated poverty in these communities over the past two years.

The entrenched inequality between residents of New York City neighborhoods prior to and during the pandemic clearly illustrates how prosperity is necessary for public safety. It also provides evidence for how reducing economic inequality can be an effective crime prevention policy priority. From 2010-2019, many crime rates were falling rapidly (see Figures 1 and 3). This rapid decline in crime coincided with rising economic equality, something New York City had not experienced in decades.

Two major factors contributed to this. First, strong economic demand and growth created new jobs and unemployment reached historic lows. This tight labor market and sustained growth broke down labor market barriers for historically marginalized groups. Second, New York State enacted a law that doubled the minimum wage between 2013 and 2019, from \$7.25 to \$15. The increased minimum wage increased wages for the lowest-wage workers directly, and boosted wages most at the low end

**Figure 12**

### The bottom half of NYC residents saw substantial wage increases in 2014-19



Source: CNYCA analysis of "New York City Government Poverty Measure," NYC Opportunity.

<sup>41</sup> CNYCA analysis of "American Community Survey," U.S. Census Bureau. Accessed January 17, 2023.

<sup>42</sup> CNYCA analysis of "American Community Survey."

of the wage distribution.<sup>43</sup> Figure 12 shows how those wage increases resulted in very substantial, inflation-adjusted increases in wages for the bottom 50 percent of New Yorkers from 2014 to 2019. While the 10 percent of New York City residents earning the least experienced a 31.7 percent increase in their wages, even the median earner experienced a 20 percent boost in wages.

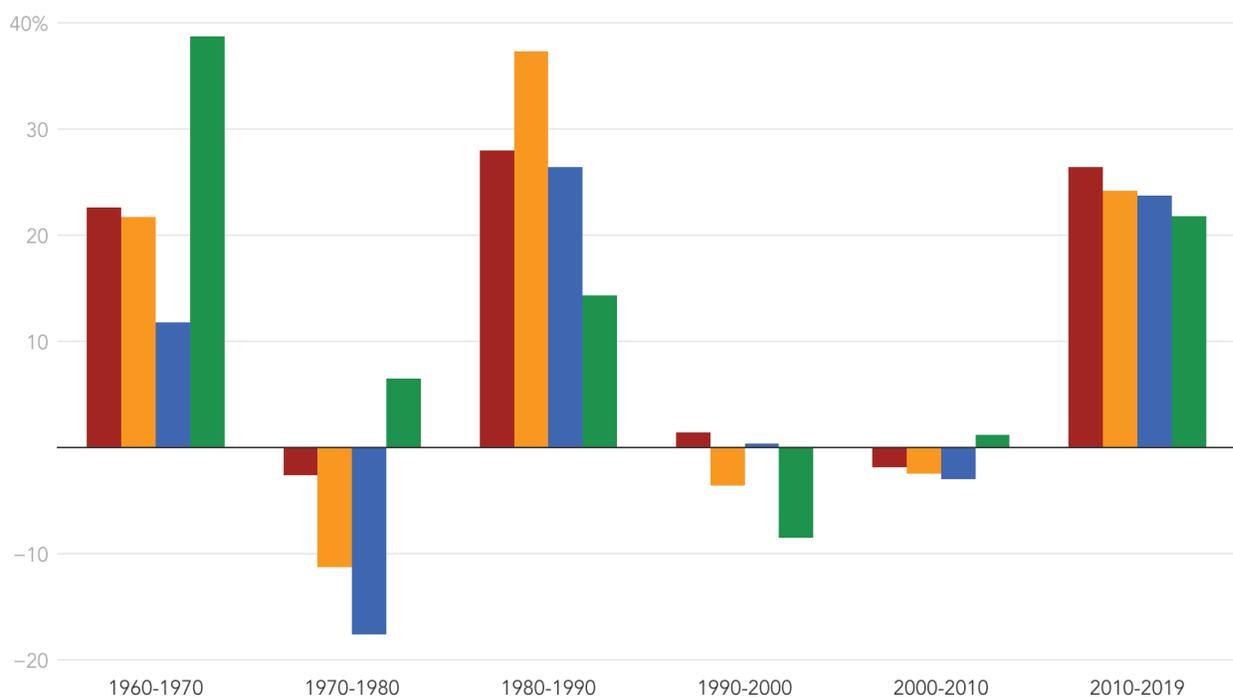
This wage growth resulted in dramatic improvements in absolute and relative well-being for low-income city residents. First, the growth in employment and wages at the bottom of the income distribution during this period resulted in rapidly declining measures of poverty. New York City poverty declined more in the 2010s than at any time in the previous half century. Child poverty also fell by nearly a quarter between 2014 and 2019.<sup>44</sup> Second, this wage growth, which resulted in wage increases for the bottom 50 percent of New Yorkers, led to a reversal in trends for the median household. Figure 13 shows how median household income grew at least 20 percent

**Figure 13**

### All races experienced strong increases in median family income in 2010-19

Percent change in median family income

White Black Hispanic Asian & other



Source: CNYCA analysis of "American Community Survey," U.S. Census Bureau.

<sup>43</sup> James Parrott, "Wage Increases would Quicken Lagging New York's Recovery," Center for NYC Affairs, December 2022, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53ee4f0be4b015b9c3690d84/t/638e360546984752a70ad779/1670264326508/Nov+22+NYS+Assembly+Parrott+Testimony+%282%29.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> James Parrott, "Full Employment and Raising Wages: New York City's Twin Economic Challenges in Emerging from the Pandemic," Center for NYC Affairs, March 2022, <http://www.centernyc.org/reports-briefs/full-employment-and-raising-wages-new-york-citys-twin-economic-challenges-in-emerging-from-the-pandemic>.

for New Yorkers of all races in the 2010s after two decades of declining median family income. Rising wages and household income for the bottom 50 percent of New Yorkers had a sizeable impact on inequality by closing the gap between low- and average-income households.<sup>45</sup>

Rising wages and household income for the bottom 50 percent of New Yorkers also reduced inequality between the top one percent and the rest of New Yorkers. Figure 14 shows the annual percent share of all income earned in New York State that went to the richest one percent of New Yorkers. Between 1980 and 2007, the share of income that went to the top one percent skyrocketed from 12 percent to 44 percent. As a result, the 99 percent of New Yorkers who shared 88 percent of income in 1980 only had 56 percent of the total income to share by 2007. While the falloff in capital gains during the Great Recession reduced the one percent's share of total income between 2007 and 2010, from 2014-19 wage gains for New York City workers in the bottom half of the income distribution were so pronounced that they facilitated a stabilization of income concentration amongst the wealthy for the first time.

**Figure 14**

**The share of income going to NYC's richest one percent stabilized from 2010-20 after decades of sharply rising**



Source: CNYCA Analysis of New York State income tax data for New York City (2006-19), New York City Independent Budget Office.

These important gains are now being threatened by the economic conditions resulting from the pandemic. In 2020, the one percent's income share rose again as stock market and capital gains soared in the last half of the year while wage earnings plummeted for low-wage workers bearing the brunt of pandemic job dislocations. Without economic policies aimed at reversing this trend, the rising incomes of the one percent signal a resumption of polarization in New York City and rising hardship for households in the lower half of the income distribution.

As Figure 11 illustrates, stark inequalities did still exist on the eve of the pandemic and those inequalities are leading to low-income New Yorkers bearing not only the brunt

<sup>45</sup> Parrott, "Full Employment and Raising Wages: New York City's Twin Economic Challenges in Emerging from the Pandemic."

of the economic impact of the pandemic but also the rise in gun violence. However, the reversal of trends in inequality in the decade before the pandemic and its strong correlation with declining property and violent crimes provides an imperative for economic policy-making today.

The City and State can make a significant difference in reversing the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on low-income and Black and Latinx workers, households, and neighborhoods. Economic and labor market policy that prioritizes creating high-quality jobs and matching pandemic dislocated workers – who are disproportionately in the bottom of the income distribution – to those job opportunities can have a significant impact on reducing crime across the board. Furthermore, other initiatives that build economic wealth and opportunity, like first-time homeownership programs, the mayor’s expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) program, and the New York City Kids RISE Save for College program, can be targeted to workers and their families dislocated by the pandemic, and play a role in safeguarding equality and safety in our city.

# Gun Violence

Across the country, gun violence has been on the rise during the pandemic. A preliminary analysis shows homicides involving guns increased nationally by 45 percent from 2019 to 2021,<sup>46</sup> making 2021 rates the highest documented since 1993.<sup>47</sup> New York City has experienced an increase in shooting incidents in the past few years, which is consistent with these national trends (see Figure 1).

Rather than economic factors, gun violence is most often shown to be connected to firearm access, violent or aggressive behavioral tendencies or risk factors (such as community distress, childhood trauma, and current or previous substance abuse), and psychiatric disease or mental health issues causing impaired judgment.<sup>48</sup> One example of the heightened community distress faced during the pandemic is the number of households who experienced a Covid-related death. While the residents of Queens experienced the highest rate of Covid cases, the Bronx had the highest rate of Covid hospitalizations and deaths.<sup>49</sup> The Bronx also has the highest rate of shooting incidents during this time period.

There are many types of community distress that are the result of economic instability and, therefore, can be mitigated through economic policy. The pandemic has resulted in widespread distress for all individuals and communities. Some signs of distress include changes in employment levels and poverty rates, food insecurity, homelessness, low school attendance rates, and mental health challenges. An analysis of New York State Department of Health and Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance data shows that New York City residents have sharply increased their use of emergency public assistance programs, such as SNAP, Medicaid, and temporary cash assistance, since the expiration of Federal unemployment benefits in September 2021.<sup>50</sup> A recent report by the New York City Public Advocate mapped concentrations of these factors across the city and found that shooting incidents were concentrated in the Bronx and Central Brooklyn, where acute levels of unemployment, mental distress, excessive housing costs, and school absences were also concentrated.<sup>51</sup> One clear way policymakers can address gun violence, then, is to increase outreach about and enrollment in services – such as public benefits programs, mental health services, and workforce development programs – in neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by gun violence.

Another noteworthy sign of community distress is housing instability and homelessness. Prior to the pandemic, 25 percent of New York City households were severely rent-

<sup>46</sup> Rabin, "Gun-Related Suicides and Killings Continued to Rise in 2021, C.D.C. Reports."

<sup>47</sup> Simon et al., "Notes from the Field."

<sup>48</sup> Sanchez et al.

<sup>49</sup> Office of the Public Advocate Jumaane D. Williams, "Reimagining Gun Violence Prevention and Public Safety for New York City."

<sup>50</sup> Parrott and Moe, "NYC's Unsettled Covid-19 Era Labor Market."

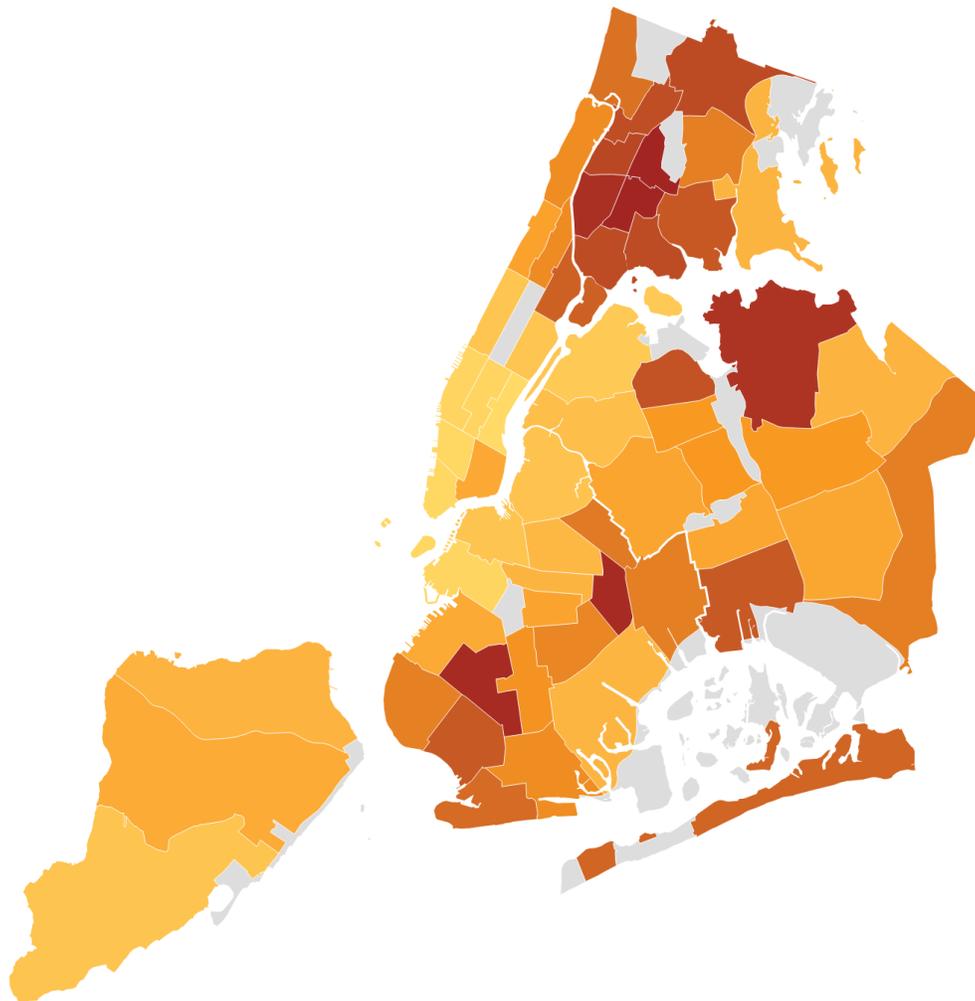
<sup>51</sup> Office of the Public Advocate Jumaane D. Williams, "Reimagining Gun Violence Prevention and Public Safety for New York City."

burdened, which is defined as a household that spends more than 50 percent of their income on housing. People facing severe rent burden are more likely to face eviction and homelessness for a variety of reasons. For example, severely rent-burdened households have less savings to use in emergency situations, like when a member of the household loses their job. Additionally, households that are severely rent-burdened are already stretched too thin and often cannot afford rent increases.

Severe rent burden is highly concentrated in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty. Figure 15 illustrates the percentage of households per community district in 2019 that were paying more than 50 percent of their income in rent. Notably, many neighborhoods plagued by high rates of gun violence, like Morrisania, East Tremont, and Brownsville, are also experiencing high concentrations of severe rent burden.

**Figure 15**

### Some neighborhoods are home to high concentrations of severely rent burdened households



Source: CNYCA analysis of "Severe Rent Burden," Citizens Committee for Children of New York.

With the pandemic's disproportionate economic impact on low-income households, neighborhoods experiencing severe rent burden in 2019 are likely experiencing high levels of community distress today from continued severe rent burden as well as higher rates of eviction and homelessness.

Housing policies are critical to addressing community distress and reducing gun violence. For example, the City and State can target efforts to build affordable housing and enforce rent stabilization laws in neighborhoods experiencing the twin challenges of high rates of gun violence and severe rent burden. The City can also increase outreach and enrollment in legal services to tenants in affected neighborhoods.

Regarding the relationship between gun violence and trauma, community distress and/or mental health issues, the City and State should continue to invest in and prioritize New York City's Crisis Management system and other mentorship programs developed under the Young Men's Initiative. These programs use public funding to support community-based "credible messengers" to mediate conflicts on the street and connect high-risk individuals to a wide variety of evidence-based services – such as mental health, job readiness, and legal services. Credible messengers use their lived experience to build relationships with peers and young people. Research demonstrates that credible messengers are effective in reducing violence and incarceration.<sup>52</sup>

## What is a credible messenger?

Credible messengers are neighborhood leaders, experienced youth advocates, and individuals with relevant life experiences whose role is to help rebuild communities and increase both public health and public safety by:

- empowering the next generation of leaders,
- transforming young people's attitudes and behaviors around violence,
- increasing the presence of neighborhood leadership,
- advocating to dismantle systems of oppression; and
- shifting public policy.

Credible messengers are hired to stand in harm's way in the streets and act as agents of change in young people's lives. Often employed at social service agencies, credible messengers are gaining systems-level recognition in New York City as an effective strategy to reduce crime and criminal justice involvement. An evaluation from the Urban Institute and the Department of Probation shows a 57 percent decrease in convictions among young people working with credible messenger mentors.

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<sup>52</sup> Matthew Lynch, et al, "Arches Transformative Mentoring Program: An Implementation and Impact Evaluation in NYC." Urban Institute. February 2018. Rod Martinez, et al, "New York City's Wounded Healers: A Cross-Program Participatory Action Research Study of Credible Messengers. Urban Institute. December 2022.

The City and State should also continue to invest in accessible mental health and substance abuse services in communities experiencing gun violence. Governor Hochul's commitment in her 2023 State of the State address to increase inpatient and outpatient psychiatric treatment capacity and supportive housing for people with mental health issues is a significant contribution towards this investment. The siting of increased capacity in neighborhoods experiencing increased gun violence can help connect mental health policy to crime prevention policy.

Lastly, while research shows that there is little-to-no relationship between the economy and violent crime, there is some evidence that increased inequality correlates with increased violent crime.<sup>53</sup> Figures 2 and 11 illustrate how communities with concentrated poverty overlap closely with those having high rates of gun violence in recent years. From an economic policy perspective, policymakers should understand that policies reducing inequality may help in reducing gun violence. The initiatives mentioned above in the section on crime and inequality are relevant here.

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<sup>53</sup> Philip J. Cook, "Property Crime—Yes; Violence—No," *Criminology & Public Policy* 9, no. 4 (2010): 693–97, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9133.2010.00661.x>; Uggen and Wakefield, "What Have We Learned from Longitudinal Studies of Work and Crime?"; Schnepel, "Good Jobs and Recidivism."

# Crime and Youth

Much of the recent focus on gun violence prevention in New York City has focused on youth. This coincides with the well-established concept of the age-crime curve, where criminal behavior is understood to peak in young adulthood.<sup>54</sup> This means that a greater percentage of young people are involved in criminal activity compared to the percentage of older age groups.<sup>55</sup> Consistent with the age-crime curve, a higher percentage of youth commit crimes in New York City than other age groups. However, the youth crime rate in the city has been declining over the past decade. Figure 16 shows that, for example, the youth rate of shooting incidents (the red line) was rapidly declining from 2008 to 2019. This decline was much more rapid than it was for other age groups, like adults age 25-44, who also experienced a decline in shooting incidents during this time period. While youth shooting incidents have risen more rapidly than among adults during the pandemic, their gun violence rates are still at historic lows for this time period.

While researchers have found only a slight positive correlation between youth unemployment and crime,<sup>56</sup> numerous studies find a strong relationship between inequality and all types of crime.<sup>57</sup> For these reasons, it is important to evaluate the impact increases in the minimum wage had on youth crime rates in particular. As new entrants to the labor market, youth have been more impacted by minimum wage increases compared to other age groups.<sup>58</sup> The state and city minimum wage more than doubled from 2013 to 2019. Figure 16 also shows the years that the minimum wage increases for fast food workers went into effect over the past decade and how accelerated wage increases coincided with a dramatic decline in youth shooting incidents from 2016 to 2019 in particular.

Beyond the income effects of a higher minimum wage and its potential impact on youth crime directly, these increased employment opportunities may have incentivized youth to graduate from high school and contributed to the steady rise in high school graduation rates during this time period. In 2012, 65 percent of high school students received a diploma. Rates of graduation increased steadily and by 2019, 77 percent

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<sup>54</sup> The exact age at which the age-crime curve peaks is different based on the culture, environment and type of crime.

<sup>55</sup> Antony Fabio et al., "Neighborhood Socioeconomic Disadvantage and the Shape of the Age-Crime Curve," *American Journal of Public Health* 101 (2011): S325–32.

<sup>56</sup> Uggen and Wakefield, "What Have We Learned from Longitudinal Studies of Work and Crime?"

<sup>57</sup> John Braithwaite, *Inequality, Crime, and Public Policy*.; J.R. Blau and P.M. Blau, "The Cost of Inequality: Metropolitan Structure and Violent Crime."; Songman Kang, "Inequality and Crime Revisited: Effects of Local Inequality and Economic Segregation on Crime."

<sup>58</sup> Economists at the Economic Policy Institute estimate that an increase in New York state's minimum wage to \$21.25 by 2026 would directly or indirectly benefit 29 percent of all city workers but 62 percent of the city's young workers, ages 16-24. <https://www.epi.org/blog/proposed-new-york-state-minimum-wage-increases-would-lift-wages-for-more-than-2-million-workers-through-2026-minimum-wages-would-range-by-region-from-16-35-to-21-25-per-hour-by-2026/>

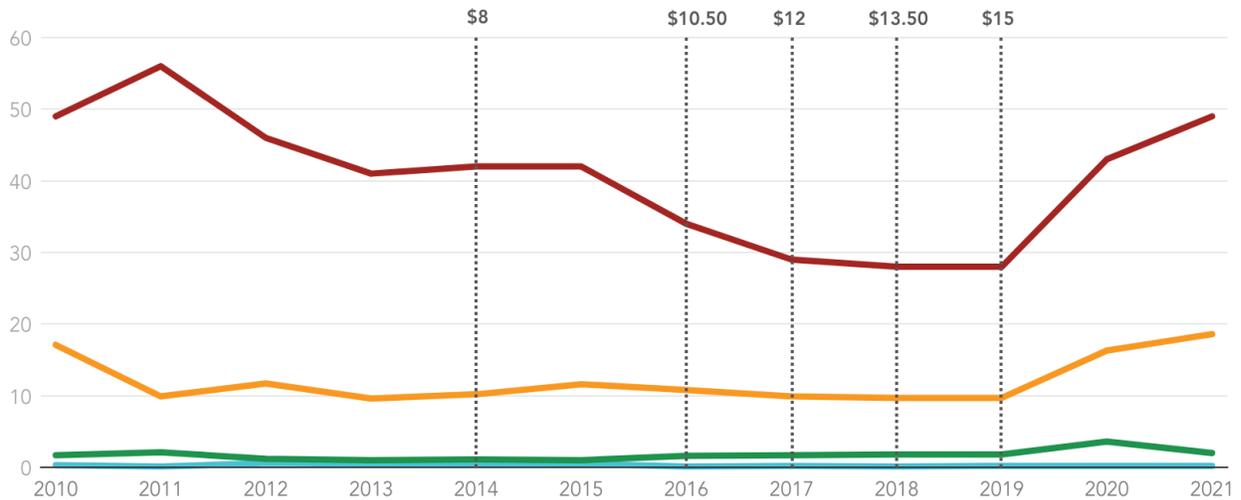
of students graduated from New York City high schools.<sup>59</sup> The strong, specific wage gains and other benefits for youth during the decade before the pandemic offers clear evidence of the impact meaningful economic opportunities can have on youth.

**Figure 16**

### Youth rates of gun violence was rapidly declining in the decade before the pandemic

Shootings per 100,000 residents in each age group

18-24 25-44 45-64 65+



**Note:** The vertical dotted lines denote the value of the minimum wage, enacted by state law in that year, for fast food workers. The minimum wage in New York City was \$7.25 before 2014.

Source: CNYCA analysis of "NYPD Shooting Incident Data (Historic)," NYC Open Data.

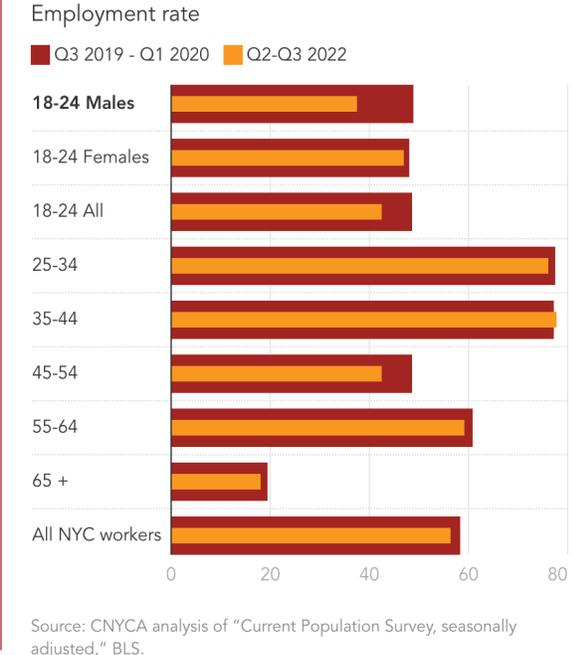
This analysis also offers clear direction for policy aimed at reducing crime given the sharp decline in youth employment since the onset of the pandemic. Youth experienced some of the lowest post-pandemic employment rates in New York City, compared to other age groups. Young workers were particularly hard-hit by pandemic-related job displacements. Prior to the pandemic, half of all New York City young adults (male and female) worked in four hard-hit face-to-face industries: restaurants; retail trade; the arts, entertainment and recreation industry; and private educational services. Despite significant, yet still incomplete, recovery in these industries, the employment rate for males ages 18-to-24 was much lower in the middle of 2022 than in early 2020. As Figure 17 shows, employment rates from April through September 2022 were generally within three percentage points of the pre-pandemic level except for young adult males, whose employment rate was 11 percentage points less.

A deeper investigation into youth employment rates by race and gender shows that even though young women have largely returned to the workforce, there are racial disparities in their employment rates. Men of all races, on the other hand, experienced

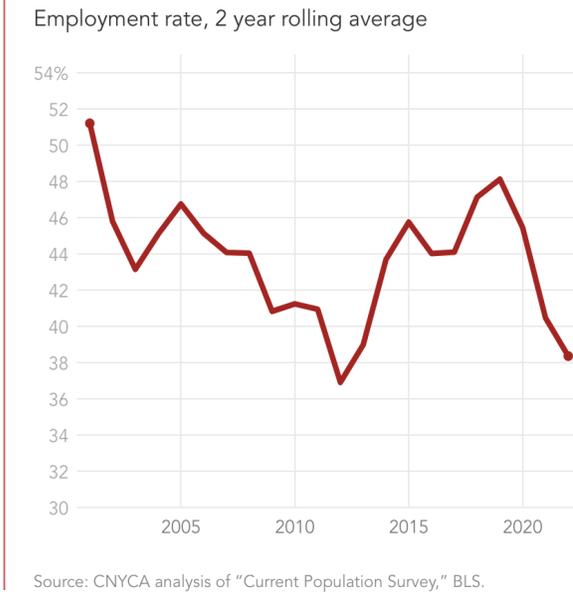
<sup>59</sup> "NYC Graduation Rates Class of 2019 (2015 Cohort)" (NYC Department of Education, January 2020), <https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2019-graduation-rates---web-site---1-16-20.pdf>.

historically low employment rates in the post-pandemic period. Figure 18 shows that the young male employment rate in 2022 was at its lowest rate since the Great Recession.

**Figure 17**  
**Young males had the largest employment rate drop of any age group during the pandemic.**



**Figure 18**  
**NYC's young males' employment rate is at historic lows not seen since the Great Recession**



Over the past 20 years, young males’ employment rate has fluctuated and experienced other low points. In New York City, the young male employment rate is very sensitive to the strength of the economy. There is a strong correlation between New York City’s overall unemployment rate (as an indicator of labor market tightness and, therefore, economic strength) and young males’ employment. Strong economic demand and growth and tight labor markets are important for bringing young males back to work.

Research shows that opportunities for learning and skill development that are also aligned with educational obligations are the most important job features for young adults.<sup>60</sup> Given the historically low youth employment rates and their particular vulnerability to the demise of face-to-face industries, significant and concerted effort must be made to develop paid internship and job training opportunities. They should be closely linked to high school and college education that offers pathways for youth to access entry-level jobs in growing industries and incentivize youth to complete high school.<sup>61</sup> Prior to the pandemic, many youth worked in industries like retail, recreation, and food service, where a high school diploma or its equivalent is not required to enter

<sup>60</sup> Uggen and Wakefield, "What Have We Learned from Longitudinal Studies of Work and Crime?"

<sup>61</sup> This is a particular focus of the City’s Future of Workers Task Force that is expected to release formal recommendations in January 2023.

the industry. However, these industries are now offering significantly fewer jobs than before the pandemic. Meanwhile, growth industries like technology, health services, and green building, often require a high school diploma or its equivalent and/or additional credentials. Paid internships and training opportunities that incentivize youth to complete their high school education will put them on a path to more economic opportunities as adults.

Recent employment data demonstrates that these opportunities must be targeted to Black and Latinx young men in particular. While young males of all races experienced record low employment rates in 2021 and 2022, 58 percent of white young males and 70 percent of Asian young males reported that they were not in the labor force in these years because they were attending school or training programs. Meanwhile, only 35 percent of Black young males and 48 percent of Latinx young males, respectively, reported attending high school or college during this time period. These groups of young males also have some of the lowest educational attainment levels of their peers. Seventeen percent of Black males and 30 percent of Latinx 18-to-24-year-old males have less than a high school degree. Meanwhile a third of Black and Latinx young males have completed some college. Education, economic development, and workforce development experts and policymakers should work together to develop paid internship and job training programs linked to high school and college institutions that meet the interests and needs of Black and Latinx young males today.

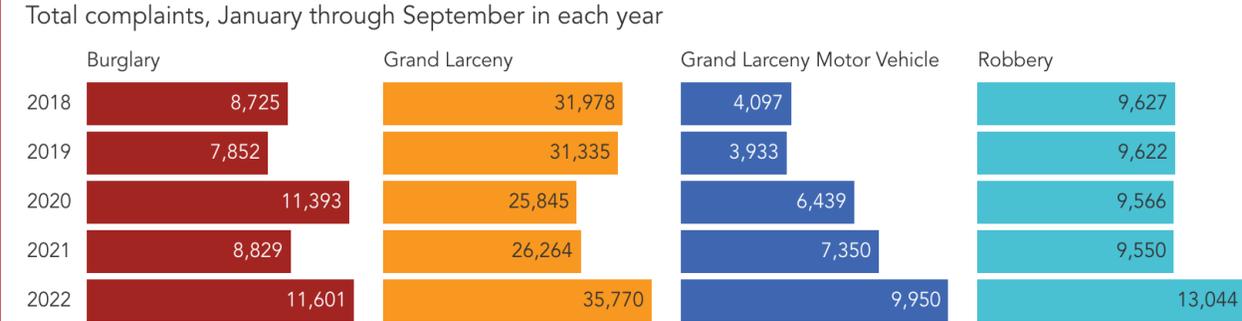
# Property Crime and Inflation

Inflation in the U.S. is at its highest rate in 40 years. This rise in inflation began in summer 2021, due in part to a pandemic-related shift in consumer demand from services to goods, coupled with supply side constraints for things like microchips that are essential for car manufacturing. Since then, a wide variety of other factors – including Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and unchecked power on corporate profiteering – have led prices to rise more broadly.

Several studies show a significant and positive relationship between inflation and property crime rates.<sup>62</sup> One theory of the relationship is that inflation increases the demand for stolen goods. As prices increase, the demand for cheaper stolen goods goes up, increasing incentives for property crime.<sup>63</sup> Another theory is that when prices increase but are not accompanied by rising wages, it becomes harder to cover the basic cost of living. This can lead to increased inequality and broader social distress, both of which are mentioned above as contributing factors to crime.

While focus in recent months has been on rising gun violence, it’s important to highlight that property crimes have been some of the fastest-growing crimes between 2020 and 2022 at the same time as record inflation has been occurring. Figure 19 shows that the total number of complaints for some major property crimes in the first three quarters of 2022 were higher than the same period in prior years. Figure 19 also shows a similar increase for robbery, which is a violent crime but includes theft or attempted theft of property.

**Figure 19**  
**Crimes involving property increased alongside record-high inflation in 2022**



Source: Source: CNYCA analysis of “NYPD Complaint Data Historic” and “NYPD Complaint Current (Year to Date),” NYC Open Data.

<sup>62</sup> Ralph Allen, “Socioeconomic Conditions and Property Crime,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 55 (1996): 293–308.; Chor Foon Tang and Hooi Hooi Lean, “Will Inflation Increase Crime Rate? New Evidence from Bounds and Modified Walk Tests,” *Global Crime* 8 (2007): 311–23.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Rosenfeld, “Crime and Inflation in Cross-National Perspective,” *Crime and Justice* 43, no. 1 (September 2014): 341–66.

The rise in grand larceny of motor vehicles is particularly relevant for the relationship between crime and inflation. New and used cars prices were among the main drivers of high inflation when it began in summer 2021. A combination of microchip supply chain shortages and increased consumer demand for cars early in the pandemic led to a 17.6 percent increase in the price of new cars, comparing January 2020 to June 2022. Moreover, the price of used cars skyrocketed 52.9 percent during this time period.<sup>64</sup> At the same time that used cars and car parts have been experiencing record inflation, the number of grand larceny of motor vehicle complaints – one of the most reliably reported crimes – nearly tripled, comparing January to September of 2022 to the same period in 2019. The NYPD also reported a triple-digit increase in automobile catalytic converter thefts in October 2022, pointing to their increased value at scrap yards amidst rising metal and car parts prices as a clear incentive for the rise in this particular theft.<sup>65</sup>

While the power of state government to mitigate overall inflation is limited, it can pass legislation to raise and index the minimum wage to inflation so that wages rise alongside prices. The City and State can also influence some prices, especially price increases of basic necessities that disproportionately impact low-income households. It can directly influence the price of rent today through rent regulation policies and enforcement. Housing comprises the largest portion of all consumers' budgets, and New York City is already a national leader in rent stabilization and rent control policy. These programs should be expanded, preserved, and enforced. Other housing policies, like offering legal services to tenants and building more affordable housing, can also mitigate price increases.

The City and State can also subsidize the cost of food, utilities, and transportation by increasing enrollment for the federally funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Home Energy Assistance (HEAP) programs, and the Fair Fares Program. Expanding enrollment in these programs can keep the basic cost of living more affordable amidst inflation. The City and State can boost enrollment through targeted outreach in communities experiencing increased unemployment, inequality, and crime. They can also provide direct support to help people enroll at various touch points within the criminal justice system: for people leaving incarceration in prisons and jails; at workforce development programs serving justice-involved people; and throughout the legal process.

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<sup>64</sup> "Consumer Price Index (CPI) Tables: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics," accessed October 25, 2022, <https://www.bls.gov/cpi/tables/>.

<sup>65</sup> Maya Rajamani, "Bills Aim to Curb Catalytic Converter Theft 'Epidemic,'" Spectrum News, October 20, 2022, <https://www.ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/news/2022/10/20/bills-aim-to-curb-catalytic-converter-thefts>.

## 4. CRIMINAL JUSTICE POLICY, CRIME, AND THE ECONOMY

Research compiled here suggests that specific economic policies should be intentionally incorporated into and prioritized in City and State crime prevention strategies. In recent years, the City and State have adopted new policies that rely less on policing and incarceration – from funding and supporting the Crisis Management System of violence interrupters to establishing alternative to incarceration programs. However, policing and incarceration still dominate New York’s criminal justice policy. It is important to evaluate the impact of criminal justice policy on crime and the economy directly in an effort to assess how economic policies compare to and complement other criminal justice policy choices.

Decades of research provide ample evidence of the ineffectiveness of mass incarceration in reducing crime. Since mass incarceration is largely a U.S. phenomenon, many researchers have used international comparisons as evidence. For example, robbery rates in Canada and the U.S. have been nearly identical since the 1960s despite the U.S.’s rise in incarceration in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>66</sup> Other researchers, recognizing the importance complex social dynamics at the neighborhood level play on crime and incarceration, have analyzed data at the neighborhood level. A study of neighborhood-level data in Tallahassee from 1995 to 2002 shows that high levels of incarceration are associated with increasing crimes rates in low-income neighborhoods.<sup>67</sup>

A Brennan Center for Justice study of U.S. city and state data used regression analysis to quantify the specific impact of 14 commonly cited reasons for the nearly 50 percent decline in crime that occurred from 1991 to 2015. The report found that while increased incarceration accounted for about six percent of the decline in property crime in the 1990s, it was responsible for less than one percent of the decline in property crime in the 2000s. Moreover, it found increased incarceration had no effect on the drop in violent crime during that time period. Notably, the analysis found that increases in per capita income were responsible for decreases in crime of five to 10 percent in both decades. Decreased unemployment was responsible for about two percent of the crime drop in the 1990s.<sup>68</sup> Together, these studies illuminate that mass incarceration is,

<sup>66</sup> Tonry, “Why Crime Rates Are Falling throughout the Western World Why Crime Rates Fall and Why They Don’t.”

<sup>67</sup> Geert Dhondt, “The Bluntness of Incarceration: Crime and Punishment in Tallahassee Neighborhoods, 1995 to 2002,” *Crime, Law and Social Change* 57, no. 5 (June 2012): 521–38, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-012-9376-z>.

<sup>68</sup> Lauren-Brooke Eisen, Oliver Roeder, and Julia Bowling, “What Caused the Crime Decline?” Brennan Center for Justice, February 2015, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/what-caused-crime-decline>.

at best, ineffective and, at worst, counter-productive. Moreover, they demonstrate that, in recent decades, economic factors like employment and increased income (and the policies that facilitated those economic gains) have been more effective in reducing crime than incarceration.

While there is more debate in the literature about the effectiveness of policing, literature also points to the small or negligible role policing plays in reducing crime. The same Brennan Center for Justice study found that increasing the number of police accounted for a modest decline of no more than 10 percent in crime in the 1990s, and had no effect in the 2000s. However, it also found that police departments that implemented a CompStat-style program, where police analyze timely data for patterns and respond quickly to it, experienced decreases in crime of five to 15 percent during this time period.<sup>69</sup> An analysis of New York City's 2015-2018 "neighborhood policing" program found that, while the program led to fewer arrests, it did not affect crime.<sup>70</sup> Together, these studies highlight how policing and police tactics are, at best, playing a small role in reducing crime and, at worst, having no impact on crime. Moreover, the Brennan Center for Justice study demonstrates that, in recent decades, increases in per capita income have been more effective than increased policing.

However, criminal justice policy also has negative socio-economic consequences that can exacerbate economic conditions that contribute to crime and undermine economic policies that reduce crime. The U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics compile data, analyzed throughout this report, to estimate statistically significant details about employment and wages of people based on their race, age, and other demographic characteristics. They do not currently collect any data on survey respondents' involvement in the criminal justice system: whether they are currently or formerly incarcerated, have a loved one in prison, or have a criminal record.

While there is less data available to quantify how the criminal justice system impacts social or economic outcomes for New Yorkers and their families, there are clear ways that arrest, conviction, and incarceration negatively impact people's economic livelihoods. First, being arrested, going to court, and/or being incarcerated take time. Depending on how much time a person spends involved in the criminal justice system, they may lose anywhere from a day of work to a lifetime of employment and wages. This is one of the reasons that bail reform must be embraced. Eliminating bail and pre-trial detention for most misdemeanor and nonviolent felony cases minimizes the economic harm of pre-trial detention on low-income New Yorkers, while having no negative impact on people's ability to appear in court.

Researchers estimate that formerly incarcerated people collectively have an annual loss

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<sup>69</sup> Lauren-Brooke Eisen, Oliver Roeder, and Julia Bowling, "What Caused the Crime Decline?"

<sup>70</sup> Brenden Beck, Joseph Antonelli, and Gabriela Piñeros, "Effects of New York City's Neighborhood Policing Policy," *Police Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2022): 470–96, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10986111211046991>.

of \$55.2 billion in earnings.<sup>71</sup> This has an impact on their families, who also lose that income, and their communities. Due to the disproportionate number of Black, Latinx, and low-income people who are incarcerated, this effect of the criminal justice system increases racial income and wealth inequality and can increase concentrated poverty at the neighborhood level. Not only does being jailed or incarcerated directly harm individuals, families, and communities' economic well-being; it can further undermine the economic factors – like economic equality and employment – that are known to have a positive impact on crime prevention.

Second, justice involvement creates barriers for people to access future economic stability and wellbeing. In New York City it is illegal for an employer to ask about a job applicant's criminal history or perform a background check until they've officially offered an applicant a job. However, it is challenging for a job applicant to gather the evidence or resources to successfully challenge employer non-compliance with this law. Furthermore, there are many occupations – from barber to real estate broker to optometrist – that require professional licenses that either require a background check or bar people with criminal convictions from the occupation altogether.<sup>72</sup> A study by the U.S. Department of Justice of people returning home from federal prison in 2010 found that at any given time only 40 percent of the cohort was employed.<sup>73</sup> Having a criminal record makes it harder for formerly incarcerated individuals to get employment, even though the crime deterrence benefits of employment are strongest for formerly incarcerated individuals.

Additionally, landlords are permitted to run background checks on housing applicants, and the New York City Housing Authority bans people with certain criminal records from living in public housing. While there is pending City and State legislation to remove these barriers, they currently create further obstacles for justice-involved people to obtain housing security, even though it can be an important deterrent to gun violence in particular. These obstacles to economic stability and equality not only exacerbate economic conditions for formerly incarcerated people; they also undermine the economic dynamics that are known to be effective in reducing and preventing crime.

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<sup>71</sup> Terry-Ann Craigie, Ames Grawert, and Cameron Kimble, "Conviction, Imprisonment, and Lost Earnings: How Involvement with the Criminal Justice System Deepens Inequality," Brennan Center for Justice, September 2020, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/conviction-imprisonment-and-lost-earnings-how-involvement-criminal>.

<sup>72</sup> "Getting to Work With a Criminal Record: New York State License Guides," Institute for Justice and Opportunity, John Jay College, CUNY, June 2020, [https://justiceandopportunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/License-Guides\\_Final.pdf](https://justiceandopportunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/License-Guides_Final.pdf).

<sup>73</sup> E. Ann Carson et al., "Employment of Persons Released from Federal Prison in 2010," U.S. Department of Justice, December 2021, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/eprfp10.pdf>.

# 5. CONCLUSIONS

Certain economic policies have been effective at reducing crime in recent New York City history and should be intentionally integrated into crime reduction and prevention policy in New York City today. More in-depth research examining these dynamics at the borough and neighborhood levels would provide even greater insight for further policy initiatives. Below are five key takeaways drawing on evidence from experts in the field, recent New York City history, and data on the city today.



## 1. COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC POLICY IS NEEDED TO PREVENT AND REDUCE CRIME

Good-quality jobs, better wages, and more stable prices in the basic cost of living are important factors for reducing a wide range of crimes. New York’s lagging economic recovery from the pandemic – which has disproportionately impacted Black, Latinx, and low-income households – demonstrates that policymakers must invest in policies and programs that can deliver jobs, rising wages, and stable prices to improve affordability and offset increasing inequality. Economic and labor market policy must be designed, prioritized, and funded to provide targeted support to groups disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. There are also legislative efforts, like raising and indexing the minimum wage to inflation<sup>74</sup> and ending the sub-minimum wage for tipped workers,<sup>75</sup> that can increase wages for all New Yorkers at the bottom of the wage distribution.

<sup>74</sup> “Raise Up NY,” accessed October 28, 2022, <https://www.raiseupny.com/>.

<sup>75</sup> “New York,” One Fair Wage, accessed October 28, 2022, <https://onefairwage.site/newyork>.

## **2. BLACK AND LATINX WORKERS, NOT JUST YOUNG NEW YORKERS, NEED ACCESS TO BETTER JOBS AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

From a crime prevention perspective, research shows that Black and Latinx adults and formerly incarcerated people should be prioritized for job training and matching programs, for two reasons. First, Black and Latinx communities are facing high crime and inequality today. Second, research demonstrates that formerly incarcerated individuals are most responsive to the crime deterrence effects of higher employment rates. Programs like the State Department of Labor’s Gun Violence Prevention Initiative should be expanded to meet the needs of adults of all ages in neighborhoods facing high crime, not just gun violence. The City’s investment in and expansion of the Civilian Climate Corps<sup>76</sup> as well as the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority’s workforce training program, which incentivizes businesses to hire “priority populations,”<sup>77</sup> are model examples of a comprehensive industry approach connecting targeted groups to education, training, and jobs. The City and State should expand this model to incentivize the creation of high-quality, permanent jobs in other growing sectors, like technology and health care, that are relevant to, and marketed to, formerly incarcerated individuals and dislocated Black and Latinx workers of all ages in communities disproportionately impacted by poverty and crime today.

## **3. CONTINUED EXPANSION OF SYEP SHOULD FOCUS ON SKILL-BUILDING**

Evidence shows that youth need job and internship opportunities that provide education and skill-building aligned with educational obligations. Any expansion of SYEP should prioritize internships and mentorships in fields that connect participants with their educational development and interests, incentivize youth to complete high school, and expose youth to careers that offer high-quality jobs and career mobility that will be in demand in the future. Furthermore, these programs should prioritize recruiting Black and Latinx young men ages 18 to 24, who are experiencing record-low employment rates, but are less likely than their white and Asian peers to be in school or job training programs.

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<sup>76</sup> “Mayor Adams, BlocPower Announce Significant Expansion of Precision Employment Initiative to Provide.”

<sup>77</sup> “For Businesses in Workforce Development and Training,” NYSERDA, accessed October 24, 2022, <https://www.nyserda.ny.gov/All-Programs/Clean-Energy-Workforce-Development-and-Training/For-Businesses>.

## **4. STABILIZING AND INCREASING AFFORDABILITY OF HOUSING IS KEY FOR REDUCING CRIME**

Stable housing is a key component of social cohesion, which is a known contributing factor to gun violence. Stable rental prices guarantee households have disposable income to put towards other basic needs and investments in their future, which may deter property crime. Pathways to homeownership are also one of the most important ways households can build wealth in an unequal society, which can help to prevent all crimes. The City and State must prioritize Black and Latinx communities disproportionately impacted by crime, a lagging economic recovery, and inequality in current and new housing policy. It is critical to protect tenants from eviction, increase affordable housing (through increasing the supply and expanding and enforcing rent regulation policies), and expand subsidies to low-income New Yorkers. This can be done through programs like the Housing Access Voucher Program, which will also help to reduce homelessness. Building homeownership opportunities for Black and Latinx communities facing high crime rates is a key policy tool for mitigating inequality.

## **5. POLICYMAKERS MUST AVOID REPEATING PAST MISTAKES OF A "POLICING AND INCARCERATION" APPROACH TO CRIME**

Past efforts to curb crime involved heavy policing of low-income communities of color disproportionately impacted by crime. These efforts increased justice-involvement and incarceration of residents, which has had long-term effects on the economic stability and wealth of individuals, households, and communities, exacerbating some of the fundamental relationships between crime and the economy and undermining the effectiveness of economic policy for reducing crime. Policymakers must learn from this experience. They should instead employ a comprehensive approach to crime that prioritizes targeted economic, housing, mental health, and violence interruption programs to communities experiencing high crime rates, and that steers clear of criminal justice policies with negative economic impacts. Furthermore, policymakers can fix longstanding problems in the existing criminal justice system that create barriers for formerly incarcerated people. For example, New York State can enact the governor's "Jails to Jobs" initiative, including the Clean Slate Act, which would open employment, housing, and education opportunities to 2.3 million New Yorkers by automatically sealing their conviction records.

# CRIME IN THE TIME OF COVID:

How Economic Conditions and Policies  
Shape Public Safety in New York City



Center for  
New York City  
Affairs

**Lauren Melodia**

January 2023