

Recent Trends in Public Safety

Understanding the Post-2020 Increase in Crime

December 6, 2022

Ames C. Grawert
Senior Counsel

Noah Kim
Research & Program Associate

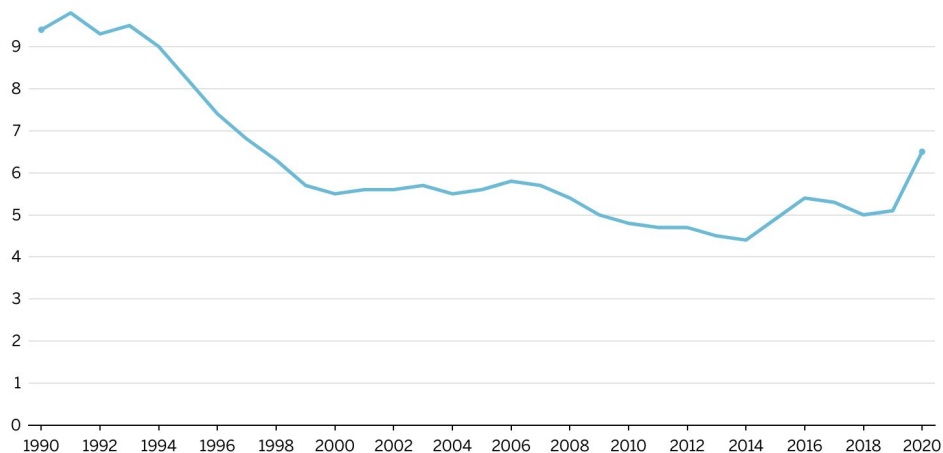
Crime Trends, 2019-21

Reviewing National and Local Data

National Trends: 2020

Murders spiked in 2020 after a long period of general decline.

Figure 1: Murders per 100,000 People (1990–2020)



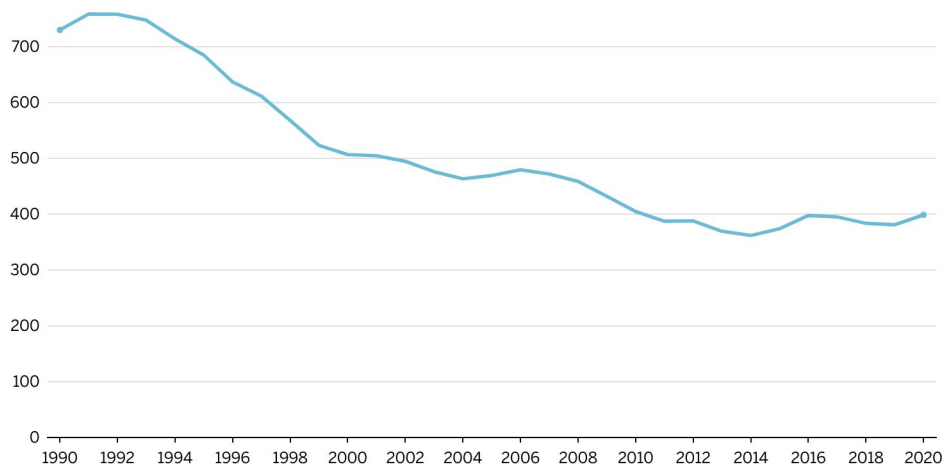
Source: "Crime Data Explorer," Federal Bureau of Investigation, <https://crime-data-explorer.app.cloud.gov/pages/home>.

- Nearly 30 percent increase in the national murder rate, in communities of all types.
- Cities that we've studied that track shootings also saw spikes in gun violence.

National Trends: 2020, continued

Overall violent crime rose at a slower rate in 2020.

Figure 2: Violent Crimes per 100,000 People (1990–2020)



Source: "Crime Data Explorer," Federal Bureau of Investigation, <https://crime-data-explorer.app.cloud.gov/pages/home>.

- Assaults rose significantly – but not as fast as murders.
- And property crime *declined* (except motor vehicle theft).
- Why did offense trends diverge so sharply? There are many potential reasons, but it's too soon to tell for sure.

How Crime Data Changed in 2021

Understanding the switch from the UCR to NIBRS

- The new NIBRS system will be a major improvement, covering more offenses in greater detail.
- But switching to it takes time, manpower, and money.
- Nationally, agencies covering ~50 percent of the population reported a full year of data.
- For Oregon:
 - 54 percent of agencies covering 84 percent of the population made the transition and reported a full year of data to the FBI.
 - That includes Portland.



Image credit: FBI

National Trends: 2021

Data on crime in 2021 can be hard to interpret.

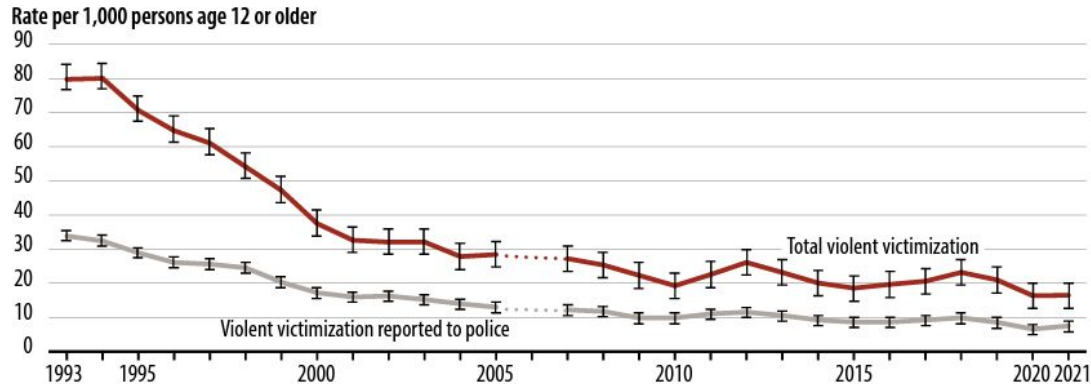
Metric	Change, 2020-21	Margin of Error
Murder	+4.3%	$\sim\pm 10\%$
Violent Crime	-1.0%	$\sim\pm 10\%$
Property Crime	-3.8%	$\sim\pm 35\%$

- Because of a change in the FBI's practices for collecting crime data, our understanding of national crime trends in 2021 rests largely on estimates
- Nonetheless, a smaller increase in the national murder rate aligns with expectations from city-level data
- It's far too soon to talk about national trends in 2022

National Blind Spots

The FBI provides one metric of crime – and it has its limits.

FIGURE 1
Rate of violent victimization and violent victimization reported to police, 1993–2021



Note: See table 1 for definitions and appendix table 1 for estimates and standard errors. See appendix table 19 for person populations. Estimates for 2006 should not be compared to other years. See *Criminal Victimization, 2007* (NCJ 224390, BJS, December 2008) for more information on changes to the 2006 National Crime Victimization Survey.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 1993–2021.

- The FBI’s data offers limited insights on “livability” crimes. (Though it is improving.)
- And there are other ways to measure crime – some of which offer a competing portrait of public safety.

Key Trends for Portland

Covering the first 10 months of 2022

Metric	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22 (Jan.-Oct.)
Homicide	58.3%	54.4%	10.8%
Larceny	-6.6%	5.7%	9.9%
Motor Vehicle Theft	0.1%	40.7%	31.2%
Assaults	-2.2%	7.4%	-2.0%

- Homicides rose less sharply than in previous years in the first ten months of 2022.
- Rising motor vehicle theft is, unfortunately, consistent with national trends.

Source: Portland Police Bureau, "Crime Statistics," accessed December 5, 2022, <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/71978>.

Crime Trends, 2019–21

Beyond the Basics

Limited Regional Variation

Murder rose in communities of all types, political affiliations, and geographies.

- Some variation by population group – but serious increases in violence in all regions
- High, preexisting rates of violence in the South

Table 2: Murder Trends by Region and Population Group (2019–2020)

	MURDERS, 2019	MURDERS, 2020	PERCENT CHANGE
Regions			
Northeast	1,856	2,526	36.1%
Midwest	3,527	4,803	36.2%
South	8,063	10,156	26.0%
West	3,223	4,085	26.7%
Population Groups			
Major Cities (250,000+ people)	5,837	7,833	34.2%
Metropolitan Counties	2,391	2,807	17.4%
Nonmetropolitan Counties	854	1,022	19.7%
Suburban Areas	3,691	4,429	20.0%

Note: Membership in a given “Population Group” is based on the number of people under the jurisdiction of the reporting police agency. Some groups have been renamed in this analysis for clarity.

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program, 2020, Tables 4 & 12.

Neither Red nor Blue

Political affiliation does not explain crime – plain and simple.

- Researchers have found no effect of partisan alignment on murder trends in 2020.
- The national character of the 2020 murder spike argues against a local political causes.
- Indeed, researchers have pointed out that so-called “red” states have higher baseline rates of violence, and especially gun violence.

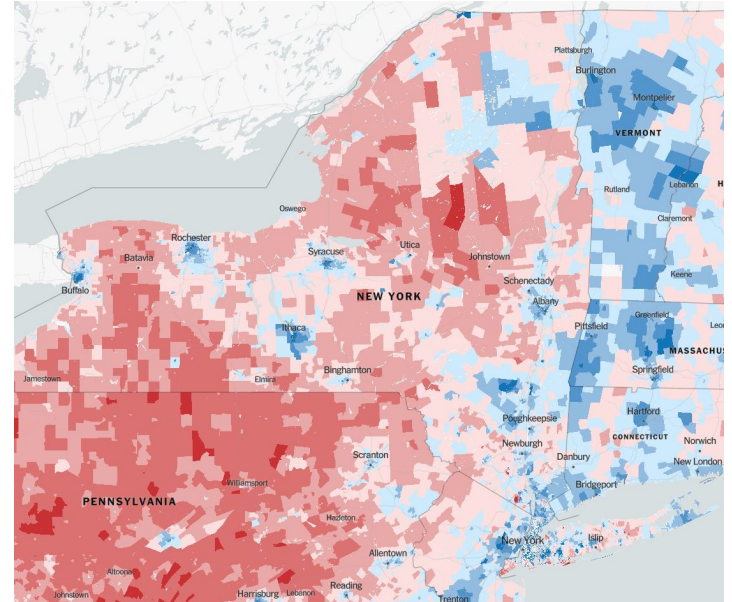


Image credit: [New York Times](#)

The Role of Socioeconomic Hardship

Violence has always been concentrated. It remains so today.

- Communities impacted by violence tend to face other disadvantages – all of which exert a degree of inertia.
- Unfortunately, in 2020, violence appeared to rise in ways that are tragically familiar.
 - New York City is a case in point.
 - But similar patterns played out in Chicago, Baltimore, Kansas City, Nashville, and likely many other cities.

Factsheet: 2020 Shootings & Murders

Most Affected Neighborhoods' 2020

*Neighborhoods also having the highest number of shootings in 1993.



Causes and Explanations

Theories and Evidence on Violence in 2020

Changes in Policing Patterns

The “Ferguson Effect” theory appears weak or incomplete.

- Arrests did plummet in 2020 – twice. First, during the initial Covid-19 lockdowns. And second, in the late spring and early summer.
- But the relationship between falling arrests and rising crime is unclear – despite studies and political narratives focusing on the “Ferguson Effect” theory.
- Other issues around police legitimacy, community relations, and broader questions of efficacy may be worth closer study.
 - Rethink the chain of causation from protests to de-policing to crime
 - Study other factors that affect community relations
 - Study the decades-long decline in clearance rates

Local Policy Changes

Research is incomplete but mounting every day.

- The breadth of the post-2020 rise in violence argues against hyperlocal causes.
- Others will speak about the evidence on progressive prosecutors.
- As to Portland, another presentation questions the link between drug legalization and police complaints.

The Role of Guns

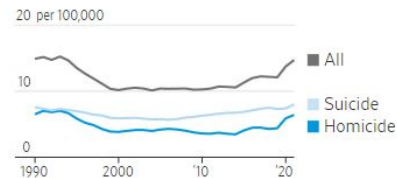
Gun violence helped drive 2020's spike in homicides.

- Guns were sold, carried, and turned up at crime scenes at remarkable rates.
- FBI data backs up these trends:
 - Firearm murders rose by an estimated (but not significant) 6 percent in 2021.
 - *Reported* firearm murders as a share of all killings also hit another record high.
- In Portland, shooting incidents rose around 123% between 2019 and 2020 and another 43% between 2020 and 2021.

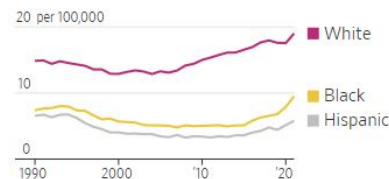
Rising Toll

U.S. firearm fatality rates have been rising since 2014. Suicide rates are particularly high among white men, while homicide rates have spiked among Black males.

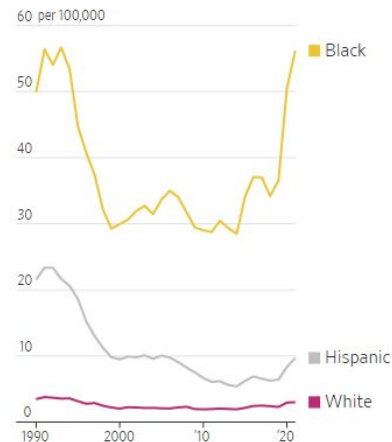
Overall firearm fatality rates



Firearm suicide rates in men, by race



Firearm homicide rates in men, by race



Sources: JAMA Network Open; CDC WISQARS

Image credit: [Wall Street Journal](#)

Socioeconomic Hardship & Covid-19

Covid-19 deepened hardship and interfered with tools to reduce violence.

- The pandemic led to “the most unequal recession in history.”
- It shuttered community programs focused on interrupting violence.
- And it bred cynicism about the ability of government to solve problems.
- Solving these problems will require a mix of short- and long-term answers.



Image credit:
[Reuters](#)