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U.S. | NEW YORK | CRIME

# What's Fueling New York City's Rise in Violent Crime? There Are Several Theories

Reasons cited for jump in homicides and shootings include a backlogged court system, changes to bail and falling numbers of arrest



A small casket contained the body of a 1-year-old boy who was killed as a result of a July shooting in New York City.

PHOTO: SETH WENIG/ASSOCIATED PRESS

By [Ben Chapman](#)

Aug. 10, 2020 8:58 am ET

New York City has seen a surge in shootings and other violent crime amid the new coronavirus pandemic, but the factors driving the trend are up for

Shooting victims were up 81%, and shooting incidents were up 76% from Jan. 1 to Aug. 2, compared with the same period in 2019, according to New York Police Department figures.

The city recorded 237 homicides between Jan. 1 and Aug. 2, a 31% increase from the same period in 2019.

The year-over-year increase in those crimes is more pronounced than any in more decades, according to the police, and the problem seems to be intensifying. Shootings were up 201% in the four-week period ended Aug. 2, compared with the same period in 2019, while the number of shooting victims rose 165%, and the number of homicides climbed by 50%.



Police guarded the scene of a shooting in July that left one person dead and five injured in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Crown Heights.

PHOTO: MARK LENNIHAN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The NYPD, Mayor Bill de Blasio, judges, local politicians, and criminologists all have varying theories on what is propelling the rise in violence.

In a press conference on Aug. 4., Mr. de Blasio said the rise in violence was fueled by a “perfect storm” of factors, though he singled out a backlog in the state court system as a major factor. He said the backlog hindered prosecution of crimes.

The state’s Office of Court Administration has pushed back against the mayor’s assessment. A spokesman for the office, Lucian Chalfan, said July 27 that Mr. de Blasio “clearly has absolutely no understanding of how the criminal justice process works.”

New York state Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence Marks said July 31 that statistics showed the system was returning to normal after the pandemic temporarily closed some courts, with more than 22,000 arraignments conducted since mid-April and grand juries returning to work.

Meanwhile, NYPD Commissioner Dermot Shea has said that justice must be swift and certain as a deterrent for carrying an illegal gun in New York. He also has blamed the rise in violence on factors including changes to state bail laws and release of prisoners from city jails during the pandemic.

pandemic as reasons for the uptick in cri

According to city data, only 35 of 4,500 inmates released from Rikers Island since 1 of the pandemic have been rearrested on weapons ch.

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Mr. Shea has also said that some rec changes to policing, including a law criminalize officers' use of chokeho could deter enforcement. New York Ci implemented the changes and removed ne \$1 billion in funding to the NYPD aft weeks of demonstrations in the city over May 25 killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis police custody. After 1 changes, arrests fe

Politicians including Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams have questioned officers might be staging a work slowdown as protest against the changes. NYPD have denied tha

Some research also shows that crime may rise in economic downturns in some sett many people living in the city have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic shutdown designed to curb its spr

Christopher Herrmann, a former crime analyst supervisor with the NYPD, said th and Mr. de Blasio were navigating uncharted waters in contending with the curre violent crime:

“It’s an unprecedented increase, and that’s problem number one, for both the may police department,” said Dr. Herrmann, who is now a professor at John Jay Cc Criminal Justice. “Problem number two is you can blame it on a lot of different thi said of the increase in crin

Dr. Herrmann said that a drop in arrests had coincided with the rise in crimes. NYPD figures that show 82,737 arrests were made between Jan. 1 and Aug. 2, decrease from the 134,661 arrests in the same period for 2019. He said a drop in

could contribute to an increase in cr

David Kennedy, another John Jay College professor, said that other factors could b the increased shootings. He said residents were staying closer to home because distancing and thus could be more predictable t

Mr. Kennedy also said a breakdown in trust between some residents and police als playing a role, citing a similar rise in crime in Baltimore followicontroversial death of Freddie Gray in 201. Mr. Gray died after suffering injuries while in custody in a p van.

Dr. Herrmann said the rise in shootings in June and July also could have occurred the city began to ease lockdown measures, creating a setting for pent-up crisuch incidents felt at the start of the panden

“I’m calling it a backlog of violence,” Dr. Herrmann said. “Hatred and animosit really go away during a pandemic. They kind of get wo

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