What's Driving the Homicide Decline?

Key Findings at a Glance

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The United States has experienced a dramatic and largely unexpected shift in criminal homicide. Following a steep rise in 2020, the homicide rate fell sharply from 2022 through 2026, recording the largest single-year decline in 2025 and reaching its lowest level since at least 1900.

This rapid reversal has policymakers, the media, and the public asking a critical question: why?

To identify possible answers, the Council on Criminal Justice (CCJ) convened four dozen leading scholars on crime trends for a summit in September 2026. Over two days, researchers from criminology, public health, economics, and other disciplines assessed nearly 50 potential factors behind the historic decline in homicide between 2022-2026. Drawing on extensive briefing materials, existing research, and recent trends, participants rated whether in their professional judgment each factor made a major, limited, or negligible or no contribution to the decline, or if they did not have sufficient information to make a provisional judgment.

Their work produced an urgently needed assessment of what may have contributed to the extraordinary drop in homicide—and, as importantly, what likely did not. The findings can help inform future policy by clarifying which explanations researchers consider most plausible, where uncertainty remains, and which questions warrant additional study.

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Key Takeaways

- **No single factor was viewed as the dominant explanation for the decline**. Easing pandemic-related social and economic disruption was the only factor rated as a

major contributor by a majority of respondents, at 57%.

- **A small group of factors stood out as leading contributors**, including expanded community violence intervention (CVI), easing pandemic-related social and economic disruption, increased use of focused deterrence, increased local government capacity, an increase in public safety and support resources relative to demand, and an increase in proactive policing enforcement. Each was rated as a major or limited contributor to the homicide decline by more than two-thirds of summit participants. Leading factors reflect both intentional changes to criminal justice policy and practice and broader societal shifts.
- **Several other factors were viewed as limited contributors**, including the decline in unstructured socializing among youth, improvements in homicide clearance rates, expansion of police surveillance technology, declining alcohol consumption, and the expansion of city or state violence-prevention offices.
- **More than half of the potential explanations received little support**, including National Guard deployments, increased immigration enforcement, homeless encampment removals, improved housing stability, electronic monitoring, GLP-1 medications, declining cash use, presidential public safety signals, DNA databases, neighborhood crime alerts, increased incarceration, and increased pretrial detention.
- **Researchers were closely divided on several factors**, including stricter federal firearm policy, improvements in emergency response and trauma care, place-based environmental improvements such as "cleaning and greening," and increased police staffing.
- Summit participants emphasized that **several influential factors may have operated together or reinforced one another**.
- **Priority areas for further study** identified by the researchers included community violence intervention, gun policy and carrying, and closer inspection of trends in cities that did and did not experience large changes in homicide rates.

About the Convening

CCJ brought together 48 experts at Arizona State University's School of Criminology and Criminal Justice in Phoenix on September 18-19, 2026, to examine possible explanations for

the national homicide decline from 2022 to 2026. CCJ Senior Fellow and former U.S. Assistant Attorney General Amy Solomon moderated the summit.

View Participant List

The goal was not to establish a definitive cause or produce consensus, but to bring evidence and expertise to bear on a wide range of plausible explanations. Participants were drawn from a broad array of disciplines including criminology, economics, and public health.

Before the summit, CCJ compiled 43 factors that could plausibly have contributed to the decline, drawing on public debate, research literature, and participant suggestions. Researchers added five during deliberations. Fourteen factors that received greater scholarly attention or public discussion were the subject of longer research briefs. A longer brief did not indicate that CCJ considered a factor more likely to have contributed. Participants considered each factor in light of seven "fit considerations," including the mechanism by which it could impact the homicide rate, its timing, scale, and geographic reach, and its specificity to serious violence and potential to affect the lethality of violent incidents.

After presentations and extensive discussion of each factor, participants completed a poll, giving their best professional judgment of each factor's contribution: "major," "limited," "negligible or no contribution," or "unable to make a provisional judgment."

The results represent participants' collective judgment at a particular point in time, not definitive causal findings or a representative poll of the field. A factor's past contribution does not necessarily indicate its value for future policy, and the lack of contribution over the past four years does not mean a policy or strategy would not be effective in the years ahead.

Poll Results

The poll's first question asked respondents to categorize each factor based on its likely contribution to the homicide decline. Figure 1 presents the group's responses, from likely contributors to likely non-contributors.

Figure 1. Factor Ratings

Participants were then asked to select the five factors they believed to have made the largest contributions to the homicide decline between 2022 and 2026, even if they judged the contributions to be minor. Figure 2 reflects the top responses.

Figure 2. Top Contributors

For a full analysis of the poll results, evidence summaries on each considered factor, and the list of participating scholars, please visit the full report.

Priorities for Future Research

CCJ asked summit participants what research questions, data, or analyses would most improve understanding of what drove the homicide decline between 2022 and 2026. Table 1 summarizes the areas they identified.

Table 1. Areas for Further Homicide Research

Conclusion

After reaching a peak in the early 1990s, crime in the U.S. fell steadily through the remainder of the decade and into the 2000s. At the time, policymakers, pundits, and the public assigned credit and blame to a wide range of factors, from the waning crack cocaine epidemic to a wave of police hiring. More than three decades later, researchers still debate what drove that decline, though there is broad agreement that multiple forces were at work.

The historic drop in homicide from 2022 to 2026 has sparked similar interest in explaining what happened, particularly given the spike that preceded it in 2020 and 2021. Elected leaders and the media are understandably eager to identify cause and effect, while researchers typically call for more analyses and better data. In the meantime, competing explanations can make it difficult for policymakers and the public to distinguish between

factors that may have contributed to the decline and those that have little evidence behind them—and to decide where additional research and public safety resources may be most useful.

CCJ's Homicide Decline Research Summit put the nation's top scholars to work on this challenge in real time, reflecting the historic nature of the recent trend and the shared sense of urgency to understand a phenomenon with real human costs. Distinguishing between individual explanations is inherently difficult, because policies, social conditions, and other dynamics often overlap and shift at the same time. Summit participants emphasized that several influential factors may have operated together or reinforced one another. That said, their work focused attention on a short list of the most plausible contributors, identified explanations that have little support, and highlighted areas where judgment remains divided. The scholars also produced a priority list of research and data with the most promise to improve understanding of what drove the homicide decline.

The summit was not convened to provide definitive conclusions about the past four years or produce a concrete roadmap for reducing criminal homicide in the future. Instead, it brought the best available evidence and the professional judgment of top researchers to bear on a rapidly evolving debate, narrowing some questions while identifying others that remain unresolved.

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