No dominant explanation emerges from two-day CCJ summit; more than half of possible explanations drew little support

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
5:00 a.m. ET, October 7, 2026
Contact: Brian Edsall
bedsall@councilоncj.org
(202) 793-3373 ext 204

WASHINGTON – Community violence intervention programs, recovery from pandemic disruption, focused deterrence strategies, increased local government capacity, and proactive policing enforcement emerged as leading explanations for the historic U.S. homicide decline over the past four years in an assessment by four dozen of the nation's most respected crime scholars.

By contrast, more than half of nearly 50 potential explanations considered at the Council on Criminal Justice event—including immigration enforcement, National Guard deployments, and increased pretrial detention—received little support. No single factor was identified as the primary driver, underscoring researchers' view that multiple forces likely contributed to the homicide decline between 2022-2026.

After surging in 2020, then beginning to recede in mid-2022, the homicide rate recorded its largest single-year decline in 2025 and reached its lowest level since at least 1900. Homicide has fallen across the map, in cities with different public safety strategies, economic conditions, and political leadership. This broad reversal has left policymakers, the media, and the public asking: Why has homicide dropped so much, so fast, in so many places over the past four years?

To identify possible answers, CCJ hosted a Homicide Decline Research Summit at Arizona State University's School of Criminology and Criminal Justice on September 18-19, 2026. The convening brought together researchers from criminology, public health, economics, and other disciplines to review data and draw on each other's expertise. At the conclusion of the discussions, participants were asked to use their best professional judgment to rate the contribution of each of the four dozen factors.

Six factors drew substantial agreement as leading contributors, reflecting both intentional changes to criminal justice policy and practice and broader societal shifts. Each was viewed

as contributing to the homicide decline in a major or limited capacity by more than two-thirds of respondents.

- **Expanded community violence intervention (CVI)**, community-based efforts to engage directly with people at highest risk for violence, was rated a major or limited contributor by 91% of researchers and selected by 64% as one of the top contributors.
- **Easing pandemic-related social and economic disruption** was rated a major or limited contributor by 83% of researchers and was selected as a leading contributor by 51%. It was the only factor rated as a major contributor by the majority of respondents, at 57%.
- **Increased use of focused deterrence**, a law enforcement and social support initiative that targets high-risk individuals and groups, drew the same 83% combined rating from participants and was judged a top contributor by 43%.
- **Increased local government capacity** to deliver various social services was rated major or limited by 75% and chosen as a leading contributor by 40%.
- **Increase in public safety and support resources relative to demand**—a greater concentration of resources among a shrinking population of high-risk people—also garnered substantial support, with 68% rating the factor major or limited and 28% placing it among the leading contributors.
- **Increase in proactive policing enforcement** was similarly rated as a major or limited contributor by 68% of respondents and included as a leading contributor by 23%.

Notably, more than half of the potential explanations received little support from the researchers. Fewer than 25% of respondents rated 26 of 48 factors as making a major or limited contribution to the homicide decline. These include 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.

“The drop in homicide over the past four years is one of the most significant public safety developments in decades,” said Adam Gelb, president and CEO of the Council on Criminal Justice. “Theories and claims abound, and sorting among them is essential if we’re going to sustain the progress. This diverse array of researchers took the challenge seriously, testing competing explanations, debating the evidence, and making tough judgments. Their effort

leaves the country with a much clearer picture of what likely contributed, what probably did not, and what we still need to learn."

The challenge of explaining falling crime is not new. After reaching a peak in the early 1990s, crime in the United States fell steadily through the remainder of the decade and into the 2000s. 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 debate, with competing explanations making it difficult for policymakers and the public to assess what changed and why.

The summit put the nation's top scholars to work on the homicide decline in real time, reflecting its historic scale and a shared sense of urgency to understand a phenomenon with real human costs. The results reflect participants' professional judgments, rather than definitive causal findings or a roadmap for future policy. Factors that contributed little to the recent decline may still hold value for reducing violence in the years ahead. Multiple factors may also have operated at the same time, with effects that overlapped, interacted, or reinforced one another. Future publications will explore some of these themes in greater depth.

The Council will host a webinar on October 21st at 3:00 p.m. ET with four participants of the summit to discuss key takeaways and the explanations they found most plausible, what shaped those judgements, and what the findings suggest for sustaining progress. Register for the discussion here.

Along with the survey results, the Council published research briefs on the four dozen considered factors as well as an updated homicide trends brief, which brings together data from multiple sources to place the recent decline in context. It examines long- and short-term trends; how homicide is concentrated across the country; victimization and offending by age, race, and sex; and changes in firearms, circumstances, victim-offender relationships, and clearance rates.

Support for the summit was provided by Fund for a Safer Future, Arnold Ventures, The Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Kaiser Permanente Center for Gun Violence Research and Education, and the Public Welfare Foundation. CCJ also receives support from The Just Trust, Georgia Power Foundation, and other general operating contributors. In kind support was provided by Arizona State University's School of Criminology and Criminal Justice.

About the Council on Criminal Justice

The Council on Criminal Justice is a nonpartisan think tank and invitational membership organization that advances understanding of the criminal justice policy choices facing the nation and builds consensus for solutions that enhance safety and justice for all.

The Council does not take policy positions. As part of its array of activities, the Council conducts research and convenes independent commissions composed of Council members who produce reports with findings and policy recommendations on matters of concern. Commission findings and conclusions are not subject to approval of the Council's Board of Directors, Board of Trustees, or funders. See more information on the Council's policy projects here.