What's Driving the Homicide Decline?

An Assessment by Leading Researchers

October 2026

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 crime scholars 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, recent trends, and their professional judgment, participants considered whether each factor had made a major, limited, or negligible or no contribution. Their work produced an urgently needed appraisal of what may have influenced the historic drop in homicide—and, just as importantly, what likely did not.

This report summarizes the results of that assessment, including findings from a poll of participants, evidence summaries on each considered factor, priorities for future research, and the list of participating scholars. The findings can help inform future policy by clarifying which explanations researchers consider most plausible, where uncertainty remains, and which questions warrant additional study.

Why Focus on 2022 to 2026?

Homicide has been trending downward since the mid-1990s, a long-term decline interrupted

by a short—but pronounced—uptick during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since a recent high in 2021, the homicide drop has accelerated at an unprecedented rate, falling well below levels expected based on the longer-term trend. The summit focused on 2022 through 2026, seeking plausible explanations for the historically rapid decline during this period. For more details on long- and short-term homicide trends, see CCJ’s homicide brief.

Homicide Trends Brief

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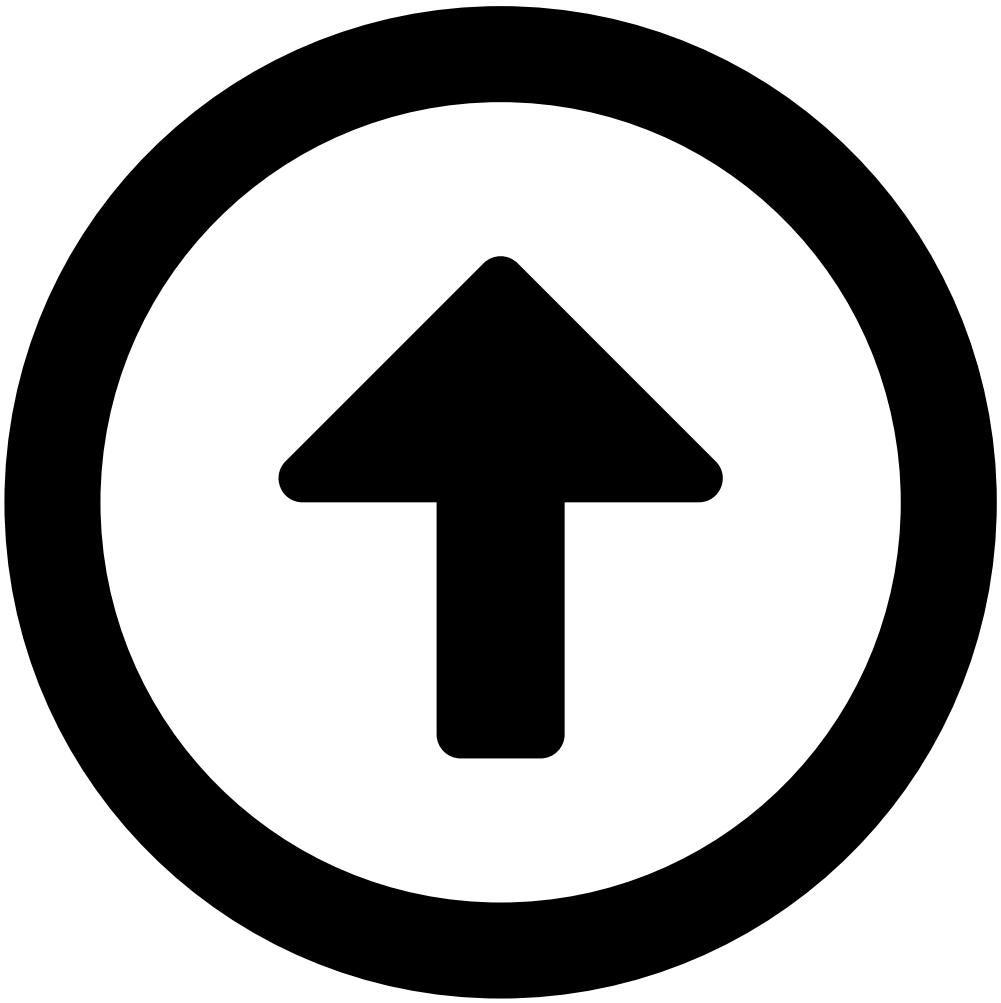

About the Poll

Participants in the Homicide Decline Research Summit were asked to respond to three key questions:

- Based on your best professional judgment, characterize each topic’s contribution to the national homicide decline from 2022 to 2026, choosing from:
  - Major contribution
  - Limited contribution
  - Negligible or no contribution
  - Unable to make a provisional judgment

- Which factors do you believe contributed most to the decline in the national homicide rate from 2022 through 2026?
- What research questions, data sources, or studies would most improve our understanding of the decline in the national homicide rate from 2022 through 2026?

Findings and Analysis

No single factor was viewed as the dominant explanation for the decline.

Researchers did not converge on one principal explanation for the homicide decline. Easing pandemic-related social and economic disruption was the only factor rated as a major contributor by a majority of respondents, at 57%. No other factor received a major-contribution rating from more than half of the summit participants.

A small group of factors stood out as likely contributors.

When major and limited contribution ratings are considered together, six factors drew broad agreement. 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 major or limited 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%.
- **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 interest, 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%.

These factors reflect both intentional changes to criminal justice policy and practice and broader societal changes. The strongest support clustered around impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery efforts, along with approaches that concentrate public safety and violence-reduction resources among people and communities at highest risk of homicide involvement.

Several other factors were viewed as limited contributors.

Nearly half of respondents rated the decline in unstructured socializing among youth as a limited contributor, while 11% rated it major; altogether, 60% believed it contributed at least to some degree, and 19% selected it among the leading contributors. Similar patterns appeared for improvements in homicide clearance rates, expansion of police surveillance technology, declining alcohol consumption, and the expansion of city or state violence-prevention offices.

A Note on Age

Throughout this report, “youth” generally refers to people ages 10 to 24, consistent with the definition the CDC[1] uses in its youth violence work. Individual studies may use narrower or somewhat different age ranges; those are noted where relevant.

More than half of the potential explanations received little support.

Twenty-six of the 48 factors were rated as having a major or limited impact on the homicide

decline by fewer than 25% of the researchers. 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.

Some explanations divided the group.

Researchers were closely divided on several factors. Stricter federal firearm policy was rated a major or limited contributor by 43%, and 15% selected it as a leading contributor. But just over half (55%) judged it to have made negligible or no contribution. Views were similarly split on improvements in emergency response and trauma care (45% major or limited vs. 53% negligible or none), place-based environmental improvements such as “cleaning and greening” (42% vs. 47%, with 11% unable to judge), and increased police staffing (51% vs. 47%).

These divisions highlight areas where researchers reached substantially different judgments about the same body of evidence and recent trends.

About the Convening

CCJ hosted the homicide summit at Arizona State University’s School of Criminology and Criminal Justice in Phoenix on September 18-19, 2026. The convening brought together 48 experts to examine possible explanations for the national homicide decline from 2022 through 2026. The summit was moderated by CCJ Senior Fellow and former U.S. Assistant Attorney General Amy Solomon and staffed by CCJ.

The goal of the event was not to establish a definitive cause of the homicide decline or produce consensus. Rather, CCJ sought to bring relevant evidence and expertise to bear on a wide range of plausible explanations for the decline, and gauge the weight of scholarly perspectives about each factor’s contribution to it. Summit participants were drawn from multiple disciplines, including criminology, public health, economics, sociology, social work, and psychology. The intent was to convene a group with a broad range of informed perspectives, not one necessarily representative of all researchers in these fields.

Before the summit, CCJ compiled a list of 43 factors that could plausibly have contributed to the falling homicide rate, drawing on explanations prominent in public debate, relevant research literature, and suggestions from invited participants. Researchers added five additional factors during summit deliberations. Some factors received concise evidence summaries; 14 factors were discussed in longer research briefs, commissioned from leading experts in the field, because they had received greater scholarly attention or public discussion. Whether a factor had a summary or a longer research brief did not indicate that CCJ considered the factor more likely to have contributed to the decline. All 48 considered factors and their associated materials are included later in this report.

Summit participants considered each factor in the context of seven “fit considerations” listed below:

- the mechanism through which it could affect homicide;
- the timing and scale of the relevant change in the factor;
- the geographic reach and affected population of the factor;
- whether evidence of the factor’s impact is specific to homicide and serious violence, rather than related to criminal activity more generally; and,
- if the factor could affect whether violent incidents become fatal.

The process was designed to surface and sharpen differences in judgment, not to engineer agreement.

At the conclusion of the discussions, participants completed a poll designed to assess the contribution of each factor, identify the explanations participants believed had contributed most to the decline, and identify priorities for future research. For each factor, CCJ asked the researchers for their best professional judgment about how much it contributed to the homicide drop between 2022 and 2026, requiring them to choose from “major contribution,” “limited contribution,” or “negligible or no contribution.” Respondents could also indicate that they were unable to make a provisional judgment when they believed the available data or research were insufficient.

The summit was designed to explain a past change, not to produce a forward-looking policy agenda. A factor judged to have contributed to the homicide decline is not necessarily a strategy that policymakers should expand, and a factor judged to have contributed little over the past four years does not necessarily lack value for reducing violence in the years ahead. The findings can help inform future policy by clarifying which explanations researchers

consider most plausible, where uncertainty remains, and which questions warrant additional study.

The results that follow represent the collective judgment of these participants at a particular point in time, not definitive causal findings or a representative poll of the field. 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 depths.

Participants

Ian Adams
University of South Carolina

Megan Augustyn
University of Texas at Dallas

Eric Baumer
University of Maryland, College Park

Adam Boessen
University of Missouri-St. Louis

Shawn Bushway
University at Albany

Patrick Carter
University of Michigan

Paul Cassell
S.J. Quinney College of Law at the University of Utah

Philip Cook
Duke University

Cassandra Crifasi
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

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Brown University

James Densley
Hamline University

Ojmarrh Mitchell
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Andrew Morral
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Andrew Papachristos
Northwestern University

Susan Parker
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Rutgers University

Alex Piquero
University of Miami

Jesenia Pizarro
Arizona State University

Jo Richardson
University of Maryland

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Matt Vogel
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Joel Wallman
The Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation

Andrew Wheeler
Crime De-Coder LLC

April Zeoli
University of Michigan

* *Did not participate in the poll.*

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 displays the top responses.

Figure 2. Top Contributors

Factors Considered

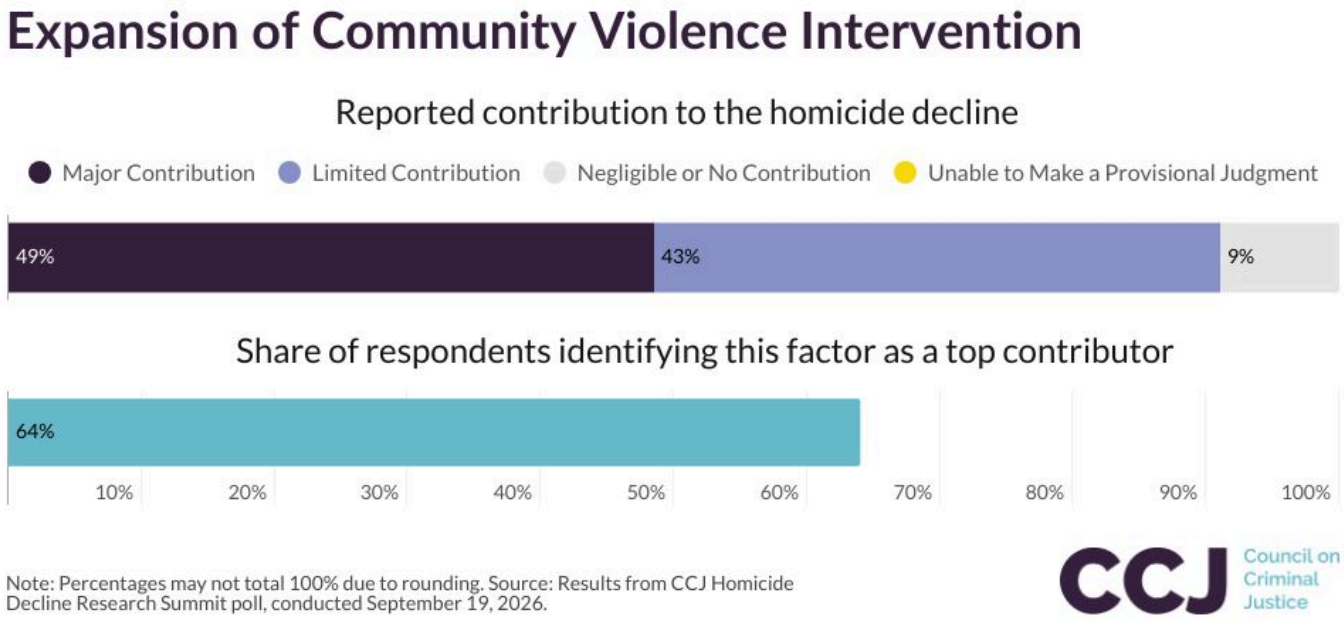
Drawing on existing research, recent trends, and their own expertise, participants categorized 48 potential factors in the 2022 to 2026 homicide decline, including criminal justice policies and practices, advances in technology, and broader societal and cultural trends.

The 48 factors are presented in the order they were ranked by the participant poll, with the factors receiving the highest combined major/limited rating listed first. Each factor includes a short description, a link to a longer research brief where applicable, individual poll results, and select quotes from summit participants.

Expansion of Community Violence Intervention
Easing Pandemic-Related Social and Economic Disruption
Increased Use of Focused Deterrence
Increase in Local Government Capacity
Increase in Public Safety and Support Resources Relative to Demand
Increase in Proactive Policing Enforcement

Expansion of City or State Violence-Prevention Offices
Decline in Unstructured Socializing Among Youth
Decline in Alcohol Consumption
Improvements in Homicide Clearance Rates
Increase in Police Staffing
Increase in Mortality Among People at High Risk of Violence
Improvements in Emergency Response and Trauma Care
Stricter Federal Firearm Policy
Expansion of Targeted Policing
Expansion of Place-Based Environmental Improvements
Aging of the Population
Expansion of Investment in Structured Youth Activities and Supports
Decline in Street-Based Illegal Drug Market Activity
Expansion of Police Surveillance Technology
Stricter State Firearm Policy
Improvements in Employment and Labor Market Conditions
Increase in Depression and Anxiety Among Youth
Expansion of Facial Recognition Technology
Increase in Incarceration
Decline in Progressive Prosecution
Easing of the Opioid Epidemic
Increase in Use of Pretrial Detention
Decline in Public Disorder
Expansion of DNA Databases
Increase in Cyber-Enabled Financial Crime
Decline in Gang Activity
Easing Inflation and Improved Consumer Sentiment
Decline in Lead Exposure
Improvements in Housing Affordability and Greater Housing Stability
Expansion of Gunshot Detection Technology
Expansion of Prison Reentry Programs
Increase in Firearm Ownership and Carrying
Decline in Online Conflict on Social Media

[Presidential Public Safety Signals](#)
[Decline in Cash Use](#)
[Increase in Immigration Enforcement](#)
[Increase in Homeless Encampment Removals](#)
[Decline in Arrests](#)
[Increase in National Guard Deployments](#)
[Increase in Use of Electronic Monitoring](#)
[Increase in Use of GLP-1 Medications](#)
[Growth of Neighborhood Crime Message Boards and Alerts](#)



Community violence intervention (CVI) uses trusted community-based workers, often called “credible messengers,” to engage with people and groups at high risk of gun violence. Outreach workers mediate disputes, help people step away from immediate conflicts, connect individuals to services, and maintain contact over time. The potential homicide connection is that shootings are concentrated in small networks and places, so CVI aims to intervene before conflicts become shootings. Evidence is mixed, with more favorable findings for some participants than for neighborhoods overall. A randomized trial in Denver found lower levels of violent offending among participants, while evaluations in Baltimore found reductions in youth homicide and nonfatal shootings that were not statistically significant and varied across sites; studies in Washington, D.C., found no reductions in gun violence associated with CVI, and one found higher gun homicide in one neighborhood.[2] CVI funding and infrastructure also expanded beginning in 2020 and 2021, before the national homicide

decline. Among large city and county governments, 28% used American Rescue Plan Act funds for CVI, although about 70% of those investments were concentrated in five jurisdictions.[3]

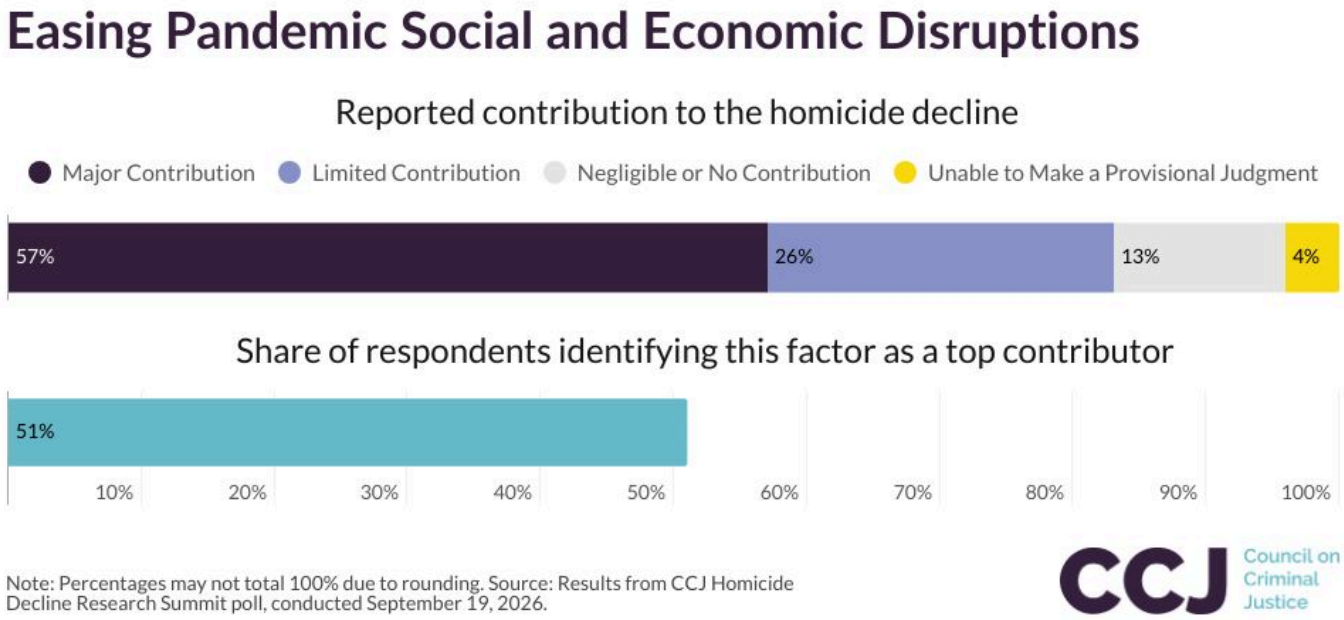
The key questions are whether CVI expanded before and during the homicide decline among the people, networks, and neighborhoods where gun violence was concentrated, and whether places with greater CVI reach saw larger reductions in shootings and homicide.

see full research brief

Participant Comments

Many of the cities that most significantly drove the nation's homicide decline saw substantial investments in CVI initiatives, and there is tentative but consistent evidence of their effectiveness. To be clear: This has convinced me that CVI contributed to homicide reduction in a handful of places that subsequently drove the national numbers, not that it was a national-level influence because of broad penetration.
Brandon Del Pozo
Brown University
One of the few factors that hits all of the main evaluation points. The timing is right. It focused on THE population most likely to be shot/do the shooting, etc. Importantly, it is something new that was created/expanded/professionalized. In contrast to returns to "normal" policing levels, this created a new system/field that focused on the population involved in homicides and potentially created a new ethos for public safety.
Andrew V. Papachristos
Northwestern University
Among all of the explanations, this factor has the most direct link to homicide and people at the highest risk of homicide violence and victimization.
John Roman
NORC at the University of Chicago
Fundamental to my thinking here relates to the closeness of this intervention to the affected population. CVI is focused on working with the population that is most at risk. Given the extreme concentration of homicide to certain locations in a community (blocks or street segments) interrupting the "social" dynamics that lead to homicide, which lessens homicide in the specific geographical area, can really move the needle for a city's level of homicide.
María Vélez

University of Maryland, College Park



The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted employment, schooling, social contact, services, and daily routines across the U.S. The potential homicide connection is that these changes may have increased financial strain and reduced youth supervision or support, while shifts in mobility and social contact changed opportunities for violent offending and victimization. Firearm homicide rose 35% from 2019 to 2020, but research has not identified a single pandemic-related explanation for the increase.[4] A study combining monthly data from 16 U.S. cities found that sharp increases in unemployment from March to July 2020 were associated with increases in firearm violence and homicide, while an Atlanta study linked school closures with more adolescent firearm injuries.[5] Other research complicates the picture: A systematic review found no clear immediate homicide change following COVID-19 restrictions, and a 28-city study found that homicide was already elevated before restrictions began.[6] Many pandemic disruptions were receding as homicide began to decline. Unemployment had returned to a level close to its pre-pandemic rate by April 2022, and schools were returning to in-person instruction during 2021, although COVID-related closures continued through the 2021–2022 school year.[7]

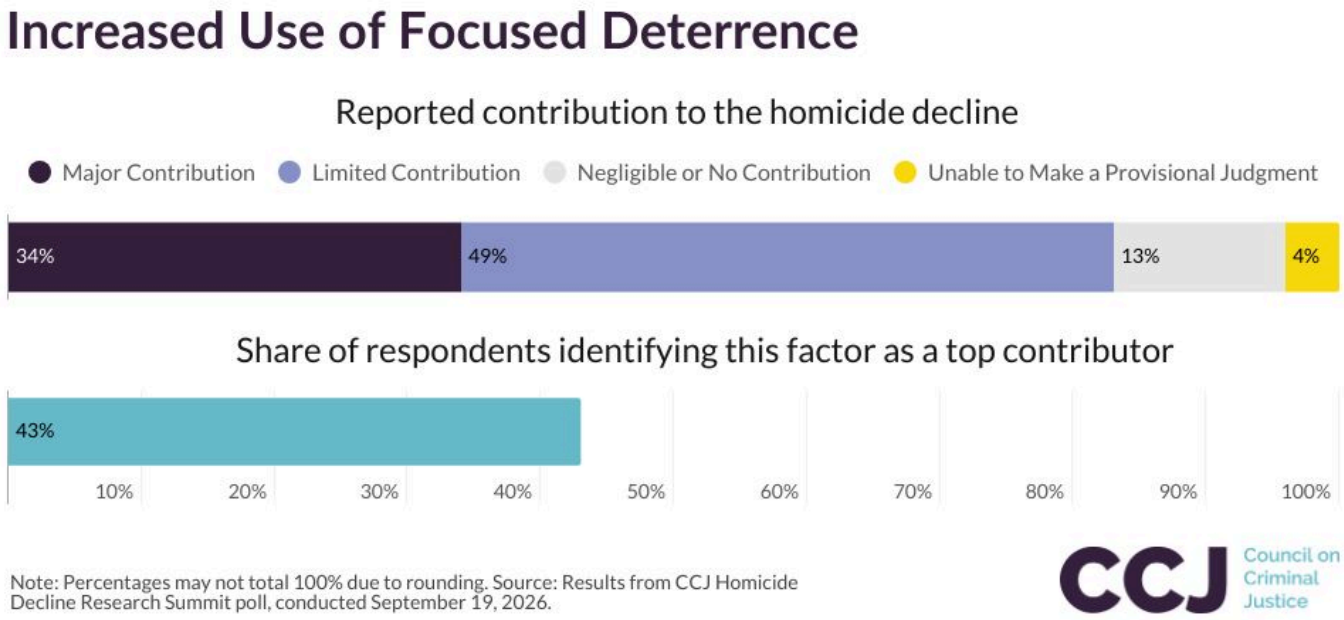
The key question is whether the easing of specific pandemic-related disruptions associated with the homicide increase helped shape the subsequent decline.

Participant Comments

The decline in homicide was so broad-based across the country that it must be the case that the restoration of normal life following the disruptions of the pandemic played a role in stabilizing communities, which helped suppress assaults and homicide.
John Donohue
Stanford University
The primary cause of the decline is the return to public life after the easing of pandemic lockdowns and social isolation. The pandemic and its social isolation produced a uniquely stressful environmental, in which traditional formal and social control broke down. Further, the pandemic disrupted people's (pro-social) routine activities. The return to public life restored social control and routine activities.
Ojmarrh Mitchell
University of California, Irvine
Many factors relate to this one. The pandemic was a temporary shock to a longer-term trend of a homicide decline. It caused immense pain and disruption that, in the case of the United States, was particularly criminogenic. Once those pains and disruption eased, so did homicide rates in tandem. This is akin to the influence of the crack epidemic in the 1980s and early '90s. The pandemic was a period effect that disrupted the trend. Once it eased, the influence of other persistent causes became clearer.
Mateus Santos
University of South Florida
Due to some set of factors like gun access, segregation, economic inequality, social support, etc., the disruptions of COVID hit the U.S. differently than peer countries when it comes to its impact on homicide. When those social and economic disruptions eased, it appears that the homicide rate returned to its prior trend. I see a similar phenomenon when the homicide rate spiked in 1944 or 1945 when soldiers returned from the war and then immediately returned to the prior trend. Although obviously there were different factors going on, it is an example of how a major social disruption can cause the homicide rate to both spike but then quickly return to its natural trend.
Tom Scott
Northeastern University
The widespread pandemic disruptions across multiple social and economic factors seems likely to have caused significant distress leading to increased violence up to and including homicide. These disruptions affected both actors (as stressors) and

public safety resource availability to inhibit escalation of conflict resulting in homicides.

Jeffrey Sedgwick
Bureau of Justice Statistics/Office of Justice Programs (ret.)



Focused deterrence identifies small groups and networks involved in serious violence and brings together law enforcement, service providers, and community members. Core components include analysis of local violence, direct communication with identified groups, offers of services and support, community anti-violence messaging, and targeted enforcement if violence continues. The potential homicide connection is that targeting small networks where shootings and homicides concentrate may change perceptions about enforcement, interrupting retaliation, and connect people to support. A 2026 review of 50 evaluations found that, across 28 studies measuring violent firearm crime, outcomes were 25% lower on average in focused deterrence groups than comparison groups.[8] Results varied across the nine randomized trials in the review: five found significant reductions, two found mixed effects, and two found no significant overall effect. Site-specific evaluations found that shootings among treated groups in Philadelphia fell 39%, while in Baltimore shootings and homicides were one-third lower in the first district where focused deterrence was implemented than in comparable neighborhoods; after citywide implementation, Baltimore homicide was 60% below 2022 levels and 25% below a synthetic comparison by 2025.[9]

The key questions are whether these programs expanded or were rebuilt after 2022 in cities contributing most to the national decline, and whether outcomes among targeted groups

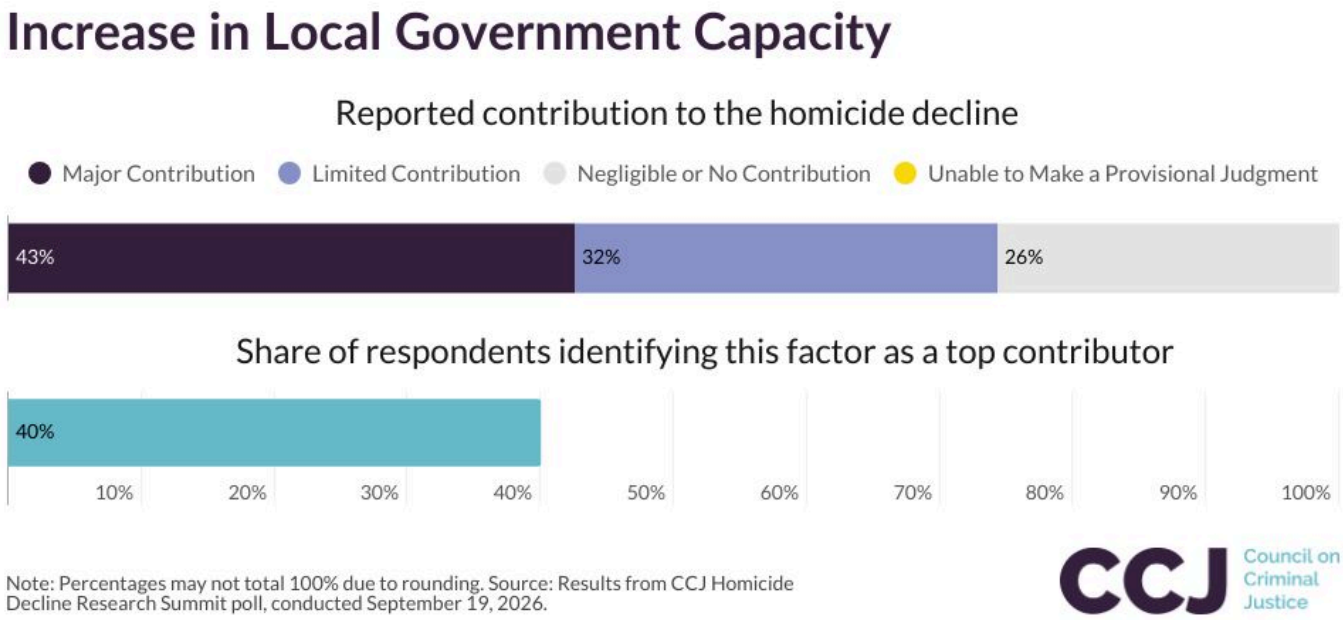
were reflected in citywide homicide trends.

Participant Comments

The increased use of focused deterrence has had overall a limited effect on the national rates. These programs do have notable effects on preventing violence and their expansion coincides with the declines in homicide during this period. The known effects of the programs are not "major" in the sense that adoption of the programs does not produce declines of an order of magnitude on the scale of the national decline, however they are large enough and focused on the persons most likely to be involved in homicides as victims or offenders.
Janet Lauritsen
University of Missouri – St. Louis

While I rated focused deterrence, proactive policing, and community violence interventions all as "limited," they may have interactive effects that strengthen their role as a contributing factor when taken together. The combination of these efforts, particularly if they were well coordinated, could play an important role in stemming the homicide increase and leading to subsequent declines, although the extent of jurisdictions that would have been affected by these interventions is unknown and likely limited.
Rosanna Smart
RAND

The evidence base on the impact of focused deterrence on violence is strong; the near total shutdown of these programs during the pandemic and their restoration post pandemic, means that there is strong contribution to the reduction in violence.
Jeremy Travis
CUNY Institute for State & Local Governance



Local government capacity is the staffing, funding, and infrastructure cities and counties use to provide services, including public-safety and violence prevention work. The pandemic and measures taken in response to it disrupted that capacity, reducing government employment and interrupting institutions that regularly interact with people at elevated risk of violence. The potential homicide connection is that restoring staff and services could rebuild the structure, supervision, treatment, and prevention efforts that may reduce violence. State and local governments lost about 1.25 million jobs in spring 2020, and local government employment remained 555,000 jobs below its pre-pandemic level in July 2022. Employment then grew rapidly and returned to its pre-pandemic level in September 2023.[10] The American Rescue Plan Act provided $350 billion to more than 30,000 governments for uses that included public services, staffing, behavioral health, economic supports, and community safety.[11] By mid-2026, government employment was about 500,000 jobs above its pre-pandemic level.[12] Whether that recovery affected homicide has not been tested directly.

The key questions are whether places that restored staffing and services more quickly saw larger subsequent homicide declines, and which parts of that recovery were most closely connected to reductions in violence.

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Participant Comments

This pulls together many factors that likely interact to produce an effect, so we

need to better understand the mechanisms operating within increased capacity. That being said, as an umbrella explanation, it appears to have strong explanatory power. It would also be important to distinguish between government capacity returning after COVID and capacity increasing beyond pre-COVID levels.

Jill Messing
Arizona State University

I think that this helped ease the stress associated with the pandemic. This infusion of support brought back jobs, schools, funding for CVI, etc.—all the things that were turned off during the pandemic were now turned back on. So, this is not a DIRECT effect pathway but more so an indirect pathway that led to other changes that then proximately affected crime decision-making.

Alex Piquero
University of Miami

The funding of government services was significantly reduced during COVID, meaning that the services that provided informal social control for young people were reduced, and the pandemic itself was massively destabilizing, leading to an environment where individuals at risk of engaging in gun violence were less supervised and more prone to engage in anti-social activities.

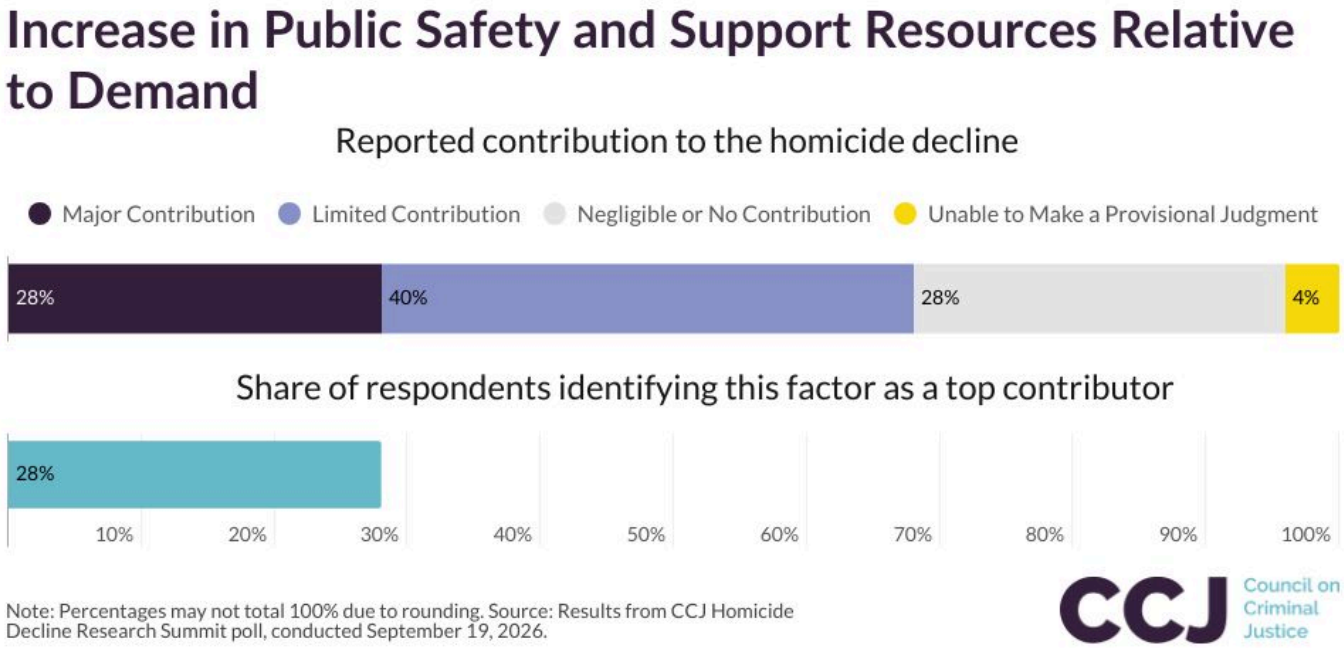
Jeremy Travis
CUNY Institute for State & Local Governance

This factor and increased resources per capita are hard to distinguish, but the provision of COVID relief funds seems a compelling account, assuming that localities employed the money in violence-related areas.

Joel Wallman
The Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation

While I find the hypothesis that local government capacity dipped post COVID and its subsequent rebound can be responsible for homicide declines plausible, I am uncomfortable attributing this as a major (or even limited) factor without clearer empirical evidence.

Andrew Wheeler
Crime De-Coder LLC



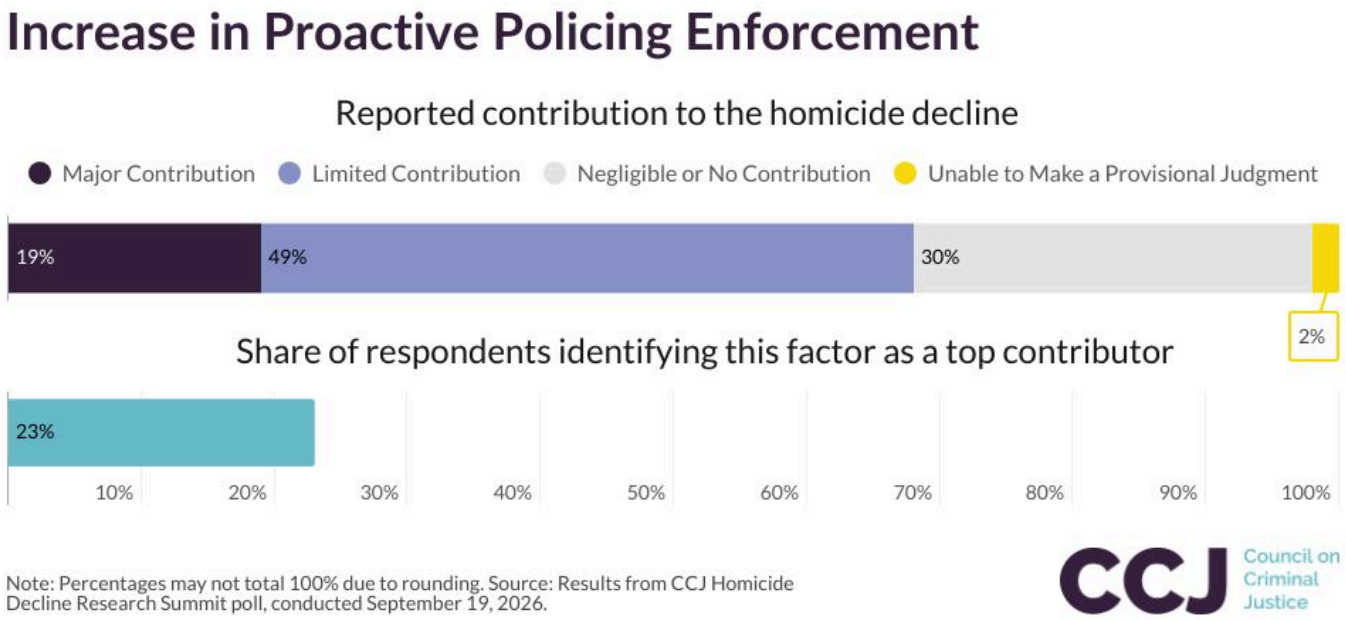
Public safety and service resources are the staff time and program capacity available to respond to crimes, cases, and people needing attention. As crime and justice-system involvement decline, those resources may be spread across fewer demands, increasing the time and support available per case or person. The potential homicide connection is that greater capacity could improve serious-crime investigations, supervision, reentry, and access to services. National indicators point to substantially less system demand than before the pandemic: Estimated arrests were 7.6 million in 2025, about 25% below 2019 levels, while long-term cohort research finds that younger generations are entering adulthood with less criminal involvement, contributing to smaller correctional populations.[13] Research also suggests that workload can shape what agencies and providers are able to do. Heavier investigator caseloads have been associated with lower homicide clearance, while lower probation caseloads can allow more contact and intervention; research on desistance likewise emphasizes access to employment, housing, education, and other supports.[14]

The key question is whether demand fell relative to available capacity enough to increase the attention and support available per case or person, and whether that contributed to the homicide decline.

Participant Comments

[Following the COVID spike,] more resources came online/back online that increased

the numerator (resources devoted to fighting homicides) while the denominator (the size of the population at risk for homicide) continued to decline.
Shawn Bushway,
University at Albany
This factor is salient as it bundles a series of likely additive factors, including the increase in resources for local governments to build an ecosystem and infrastructure (e.g., data surveillance, service delivery), proactive policing, focal deterrence, and social programs (e.g., CVI) that address the highest risk populations, while also recognizing the shift to an older offending population and attrition factors.
Patrick Carter
University of Michigan
The argument is very compelling and could plausibly explain some share of the decline at a system level. In part, it’s complementary to the other explanations, such as the increase in local government capacity.
Ernesto Lopez
Council on Criminal Justice
Young people simply behave different than older generations. Rates of drinking, delinquency, etc. are significantly lower. It follows, then, that with a smaller population “at-risk,” and a criminal justice and community violence prevention ecosystem designed for larger capacity, that there would be greater resources to focus on those at greatest need.
Matt Vogel
University at Albany



Proactive policing refers to officer-initiated police activity intended to prevent crime, including pedestrian and vehicle stops, patrols, and other discretionary enforcement. For homicide, the most relevant activities target illegal gun carrying and gun violence. The potential homicide connection is that these activities may increase the perceived likelihood of apprehension, deter illegal gun carrying, or interrupt situations that could become shootings. Several cities recorded sharp declines in discretionary police activity after George Floyd’s murder in 2020, as homicides and shootings also rose.[15] Research on whether reduced police activity contributed to violence is mixed. In St. Louis, one analysis found that lower officer-initiated police activity was associated with higher homicide after Michael Brown was shot and killed by a police officer in Ferguson in 2014; the same study did not find that pattern across 60 large cities.[16] A New York City study linked fewer police stops with increases in gun, non-domestic, and gang homicides.[17] In Minneapolis, a 2026 study estimated that reduced stops accounted for about 25% of the homicide increase following Floyd’s murder.[18]

The key questions are how officer-initiated enforcement aimed at gun carrying and shootings shifted after 2022 in places contributing most to the national homicide decline, and whether patterns in that activity were associated with the size of local declines in homicide.

Participant Comments

An increase in proactive policing is attractive because it is an umbrella that encompasses various factors that likely have at least a small impact on the

homicide decline, including policing strategies, increased use or improved use of police technology, and county allocation of resources. It also speaks to the mental aspect of proactive policing and use of discretion to be more proactive and preventative, which dwindled dramatically after George Floyd and other police-involved shootings, and is slowly being restored as less public attention is focused on policing.

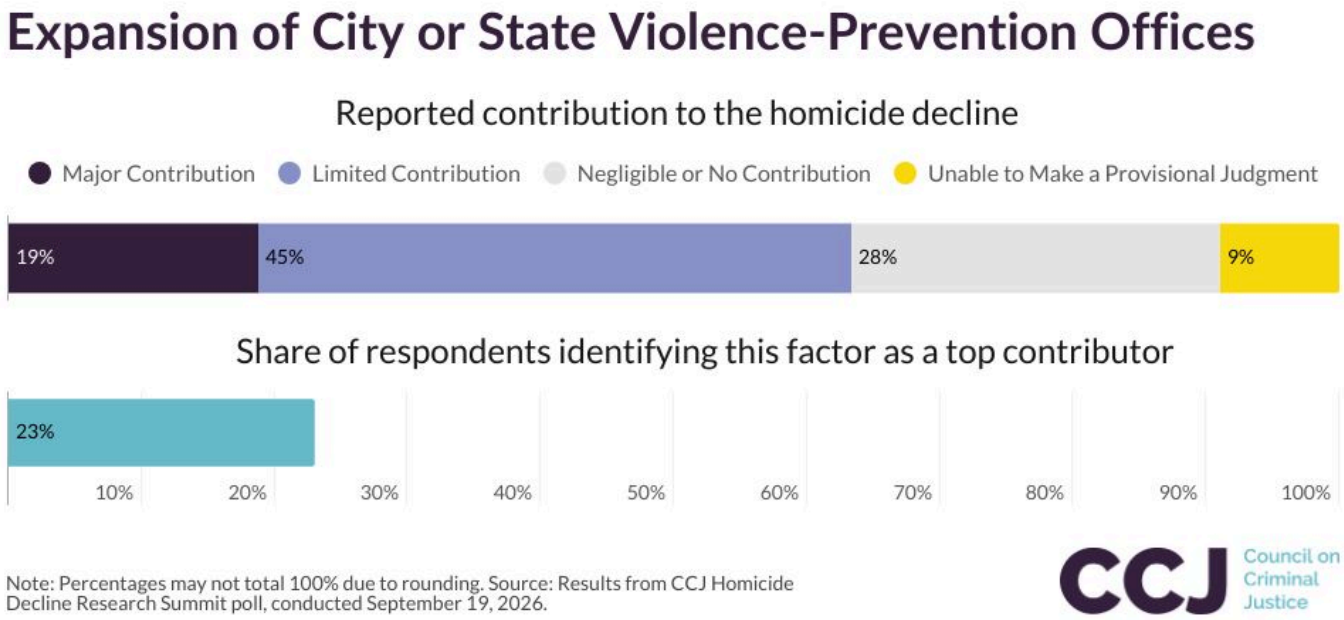
Megan Augustyn,
University of Texas at Dallas

The key to understanding the 2022-26 decline is that it was, largely, a return to the downward trend in homicides occurring from 2019 and earlier. The 2020-21 homicide spike was due to a "Minneapolis Effect"—that is, police pullbacks resulting in a decline in proactive policing (e.g., vehicle stops, pedestrian stops, and anti-gun patrols)—both quantitatively (fewer stops) and qualitatively (less willingness to engage in aggressive tactics). This pullback explains the pattern that what was occurring in major cities across the country after the last week in May 2020 was largely a homicide (and aggravated assault) increase—not a broader increase in all violent and property crimes.

Paul Cassell
S.J. Quinney College of Law at the University of Utah

There was a dramatic decline in low-level police activity in 2020, as a result of the pandemic/defund movement. That level has returned to normal in recent years in many major cities. Insofar as those low-level enforcement efforts are part of proactive strategies, they almost certainly deter or incapacitate high-risk offenders.

Charles Lehman
Manhattan Institute



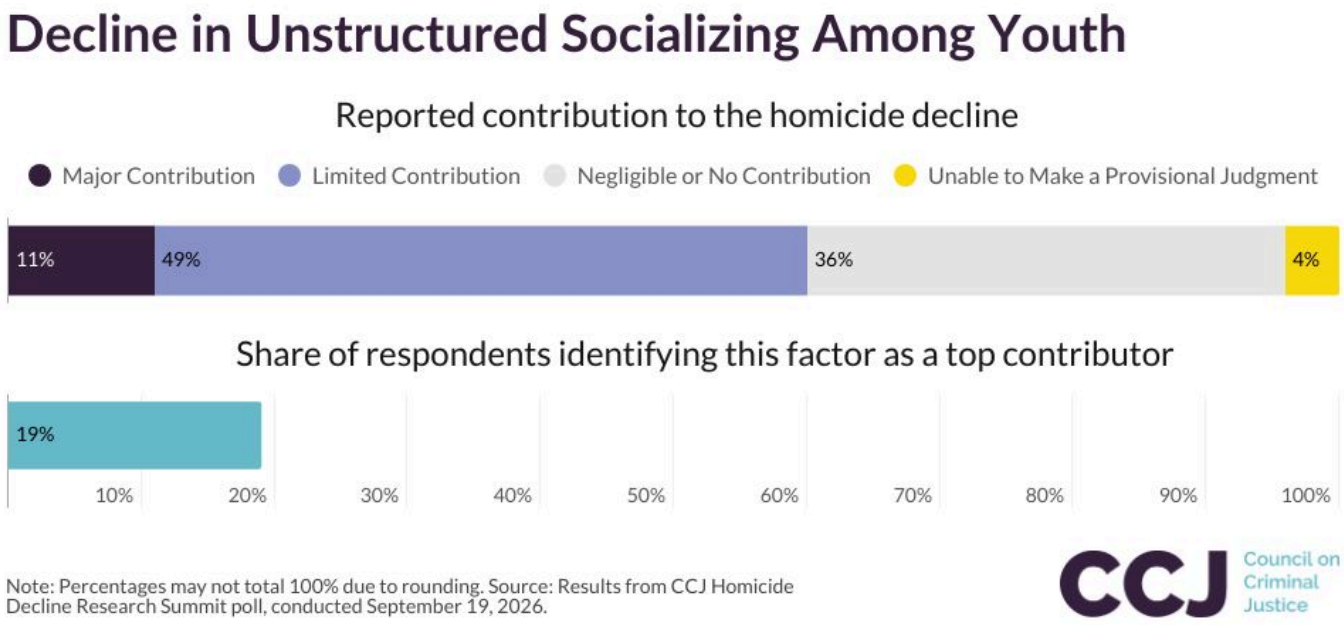
State and local violence-prevention offices are dedicated government units that coordinate violence-reduction work. Local offices often connect police, community organizations, public health, victim services, hospitals, and other partners; state offices may also coordinate across jurisdictions, administer grants, and support data and research. The potential homicide connection is organizational: these offices may help partners align strategies, share information, direct resources, and carry out interventions more consistently. Evidence is primarily about the strategies these offices coordinate rather than office creation itself. In Baltimore, a coordinated Group Violence Reduction Strategy involving the mayoral violence-prevention office was associated with a citywide homicide rate about 25% below comparison cities, although the analysis cannot separate the office’s role from the programs, policing, services, and other changes it coordinated.[19] An international systematic review found that violence-observatory models were associated with reductions in homicide in high-violence settings.[20] Violence-prevention offices also became a more common after 2020, as jurisdictions expanded civilian capacity to coordinate these efforts.[21]

The key questions are whether governments strengthened this coordinating capacity from 2022 to 2026, particularly in places with large homicide declines, and whether that was associated with more effective violence-reduction efforts.

Participant Comments

The expansion of violence prevention offices has provided a critical role in the

coordination, implementation, and expansion of evidence-based violence prevention work. This expansion has allowed for resources to be used more effectively and for new resources to be allocated to violence prevention activities.
Thomas Simon
Health Alliance for Violence Intervention
Along with CVI programs and interventions, the expansion of city or state violence-prevention offices seems like a plausible major contributor to decreasing homicide rates. The policy choices and investment in OVPs are specifically targeting youth who are most at risk for violence and homicide. The evidence presented is that these offices have expanded across the country and get to the issue of scale, and in terms of timing, they mostly grew in the post-pandemic era.
Laura Vargas
University of Colorado School of Medicine
The coordination of violence interruption by informal and state actors needs to be coordinated by the city. Otherwise it can be a patchwork of interventions that do not always do what they should do, and can even make the problem worse. It appears that there was some strengthening of this capacity during the time period we are interested in, especially in cities that had homicide rates that were relatively high. Thus, the potential to contribute to the national decline is important, and potentially significant.
María Vélez
University of Maryland, College Park



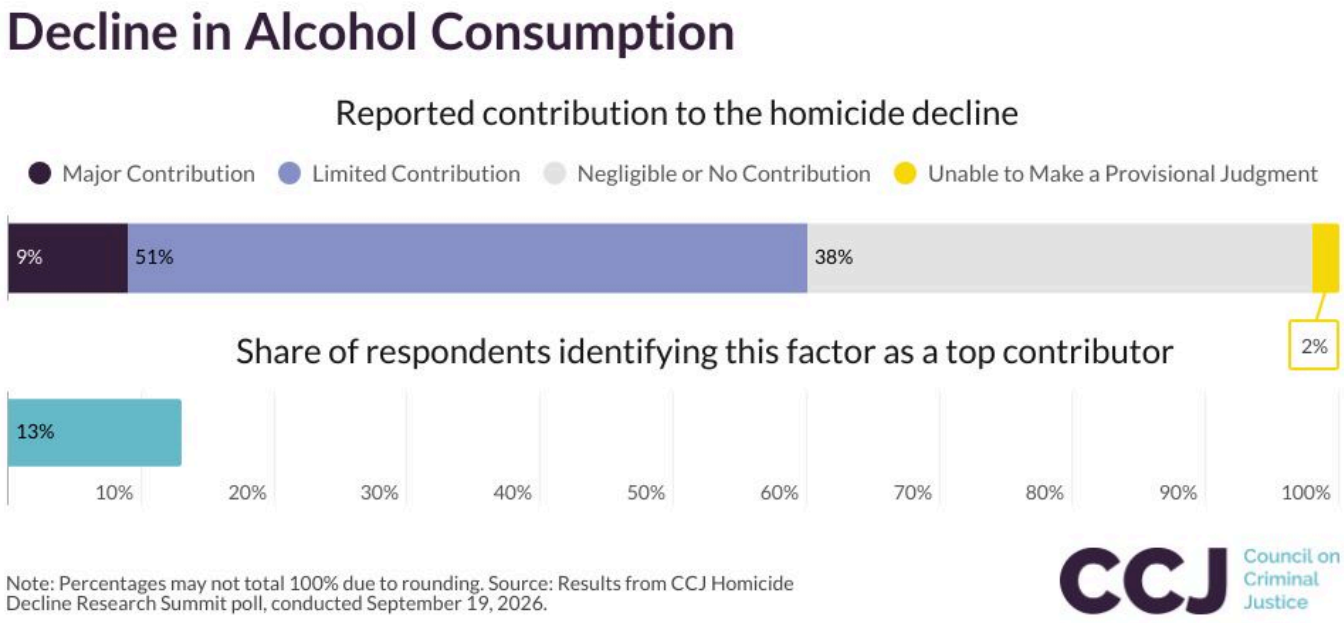
Unstructured socializing is time young people spend with peers without adult supervision or organized activities—hanging out, driving around, going to parties, or otherwise spending time together on their own. The potential homicide connection is that a decline in time spent with peers away from adult supervision could reduce opportunities for group offending, conflict, or exposure to violence. Youth violence often involves peers: Recent data shows that about 60% of young people ages 15 to 19 who were accused of murder were involved with at least one other person.[22] Research has also linked unstructured socializing to gang involvement, violent offending, and exposure to violence.[23] Measures of teen independence and in-person socializing have declined over the past two decades, while youth aggravated assault fell about 35% between 2009 and 2024.[24] Homicide has not always followed the same pattern. From 2019 to 2021, unstructured socializing and general youth delinquency both fell sharply, while youth involvement in homicide rose.[25] Most research on unstructured socializing has examined delinquency generally rather than homicide specifically.

The key questions are whether young people at greatest risk of serious violence spent less time socializing with peers away from adult supervision after 2022, and whether that shift contributed to homicide reductions at a scale that affected the national trend.

see full research brief

Participant Comments

The decline in unstructured socializing among youth is one of several structural changes that have pushed crime down since the early 1990s. For example, Americans drink less, which matters because alcohol sits at the center of a large share of assaults and homicides. Teenagers spend far less time hanging out unsupervised, partly because they socialize through screens instead of street corners and cars. And the population aged, shrinking the share of people in the years when offending peaks. These forces move slowly and rarely show up in any single year's data, but they set the floor the 2020 spike bounced off and returned to.
James Densley
Hamline University
The change in youth routine activities is a central factor. More time alone allows less opportunity. An important data point for me is that juvenile offending in groups declined more than overall juvenile offending.
Anne Piehl
Rutgers University



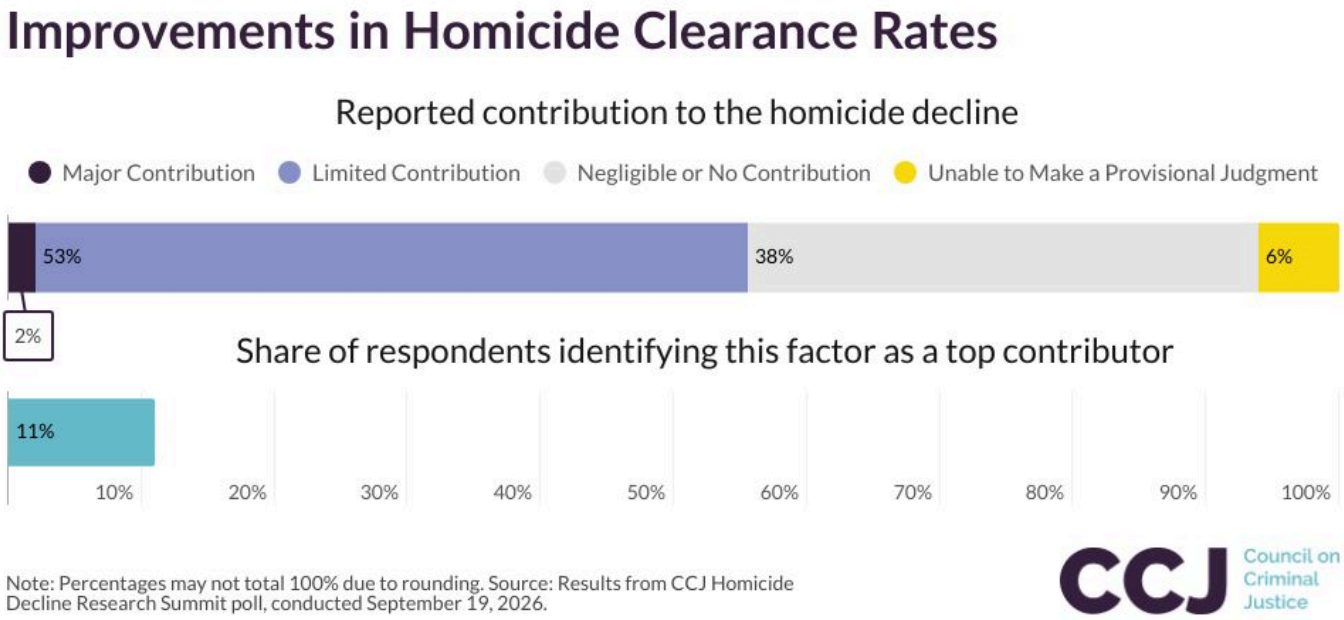
Alcohol consumption may affect homicide by changing how conflicts unfold. The potential homicide connection is that alcohol can impair judgment, lower inhibitions, and increase impulsivity or aggression, increasing the chance that conflicts become serious or lethal. Reviews find that alcohol is present in a substantial share of homicides and that alcohol exposure is strongly associated with several forms of firearm violence and related risk.[26] Recent national indicators point to lower alcohol consumption: Per capita consumption fell 1.2% from 2022 to 2023, with declines in 41 states and the District of Columbia, while the share of U.S. adults reporting that they drink alcohol fell to 54% in 2025, the lowest level in Gallup’s trend dating to 1939.[27] These measures do not show whether declines were concentrated in heavy drinking or in settings where alcohol is more likely to be involved in serious violence.

The key question is whether recent declines in alcohol use occurred among the people and in the contexts most connected to homicide and other serious violence.

Participant Comments

Young people are drinking substantially less than prior generations, and drinking is a risk factor both for perpetrating and being the victim of homicide. In addition, about 175,000 Americans a year are dying from alcohol-related causes. This reduces alcohol consumption because these are generally very heavy drinkers, but it could also be removing many potential homicide victims and perpetrators from

the population.
Keith Humphreys
Stanford University



Homicide clearance rates measure the share of reported homicides that police solve through an arrest or, in some cases, by “exceptional means”—when police identify the person responsible and have enough evidence to make an arrest, but cannot do so for reasons beyond their control, such as the person’s death. The potential homicide connection is that solving more homicide and shooting cases can lead to arrests that prevent repeat violence, increase the perceived likelihood of apprehension, and increase willingness to cooperate with investigations. Research generally finds that crime is more responsive to the likelihood of apprehension than to punishment severity, while homicide-specific research links higher actual and perceived clearance rates with greater stated willingness to cooperate with investigations.[28] The national homicide clearance rate reported by the FBI rose from 52% in 2022 to 61% in 2024 and 69% in 2025.[29] Annual clearance rates, however, can include earlier homicides cleared during the current year, and falling homicide may itself raise clearance by reducing investigative caseloads.[30]

The key question is whether the likelihood of solving newly occurring homicides increased as homicide fell, or whether annual clearance rates rose mainly because fewer cases were competing for investigative resources or older cases were being cleared.

Participant Comments

Clearance rates are among the most important measures of police effectiveness. The fact that police effectiveness in resolving homicide crimes has significantly increased in the years of interest (2022-25) is an historically important fact that should not be neglected. Part of the explanation for increased clearance rates is likely the increase in proactive policing (and police staffing). Effectively clearing homicide crimes means both an increase incapacitation (shooters off the streets) and prospective deterrence (shooters' assessment of the risk of apprehension—or the risk of carrying a firearm).

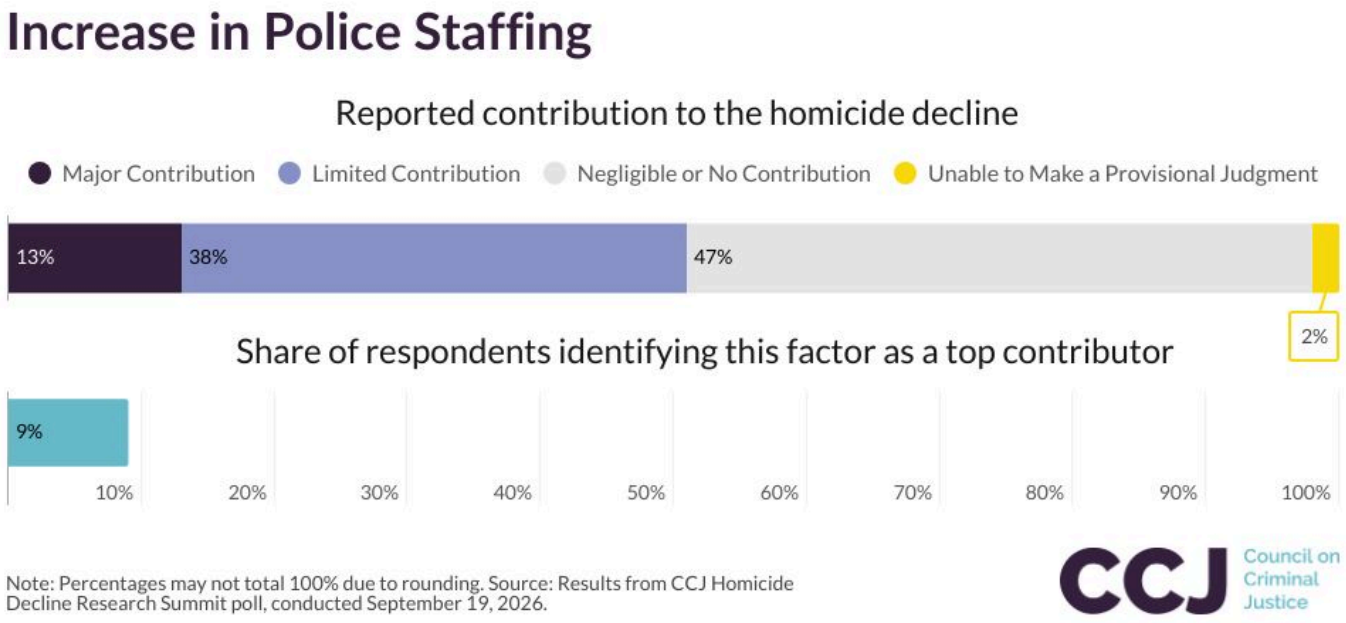
Paul Cassell
S.J. Quinney College of Law at the University of Utah

We know that the arrest rate did increase starting in 2022. And we know that it has a preventive effect through incapacitation and deterrence and possibly interruption of retaliatory cycles. Probably not a big share.

Philip Cook
Duke University

During the 2022-2026 timeframe fatal and nonfatal shooting homicide clearance rates did not substantially improve based on the limited data we have—for instance the proportion of firearm homicides cleared by arrest in six months was 48% in 2022 and rose to 54% in 2024. The magnitude of this increase is not sufficiently high to account for a substantial decline in homicides, particularly as the relationship between homicide clearance and homicide is complex

Susan Parker
Northwestern University



Police staffing refers to the number of sworn officers employed by law enforcement agencies. The potential homicide connection is that more officers may increase police presence and enforcement capacity, raising the perceived likelihood of apprehension and deterring violence. Research generally finds that larger police forces reduce crime, including homicide; one study estimated that a 10% increase in police staffing was associated with a roughly 6% reduction in homicide.[31] During the recent homicide rise and decline, an analysis of FBI data for 167 large cities found that sworn staffing fell about 6% from 2019 to 2023 and then stabilized in 2024; homicide rose by roughly 40% between 2019 and 2022 before falling substantially over the next two years.[32] Based on the historical relationship between staffing and homicide, a staffing change of that size would correspond to about a 3% to 4% change in homicide. Across cities, changes in staffing between 2022 and 2024 showed little relationship to changes in homicide. Research suggests that where and how officers are deployed can matter, so total staffing may not capture changes in police presence or activity.[33]

The key question is whether staffing changes of the size observed during the homicide decline translated into changes in police presence or enforcement capacity where serious violence was most likely to occur.

see full research brief

Participant Comments

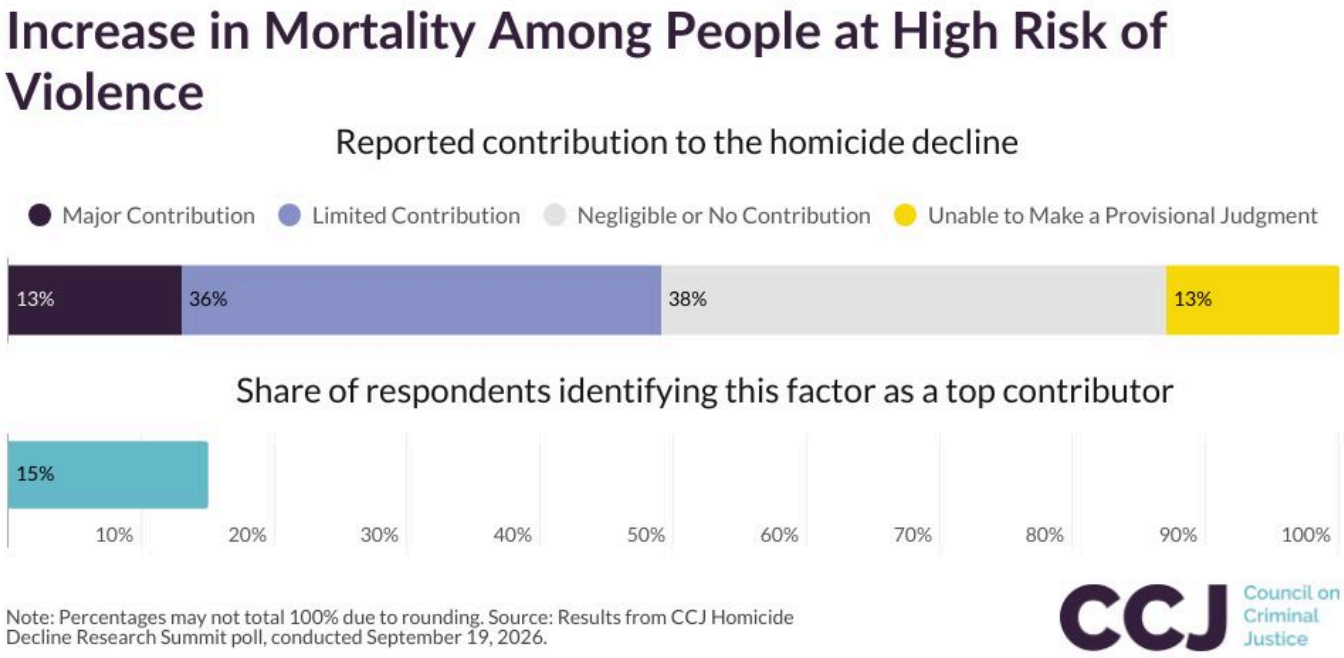
Timing fit is key. The immediate aftermath of the Floyd protests brought sharp and

steep increases in police resignations from major metro agencies, with those officers simply relocating to suburban agencies. These are the same areas responsible for largest share of homicide increases and subsequent decreases. This is a story about labor supply and call demand.

Ian Adams
University of South Carolina

I am a contributor to this body of research and I find it generally unconvincing. We are long past the idea that overall staffing has strong linkages with crime declines. It is what we assign officers to do more than the sheer number of them that matters.

Ed Maguire
Arizona State University



During 2020 and 2021, the U.S. recorded roughly 1 million more deaths than expected, including deaths from COVID-19, drug overdose, suicide, motor-vehicle crashes, and homicide.[34] The potential homicide connection is that some of those deaths may have occurred among people in the small networks where serious violence is concentrated, leaving fewer people at risk of later violence, either as victims or as people who commit violent crimes. That pathway depends on who died: Violence is concentrated within relatively small networks, and conflicts can persist even after particular people die.[35] Most excess deaths were COVID-19 fatalities among older adults, while overdose and suicide deaths were concentrated in middle adulthood.[36] In Minneapolis and St. Paul, excess homicides were

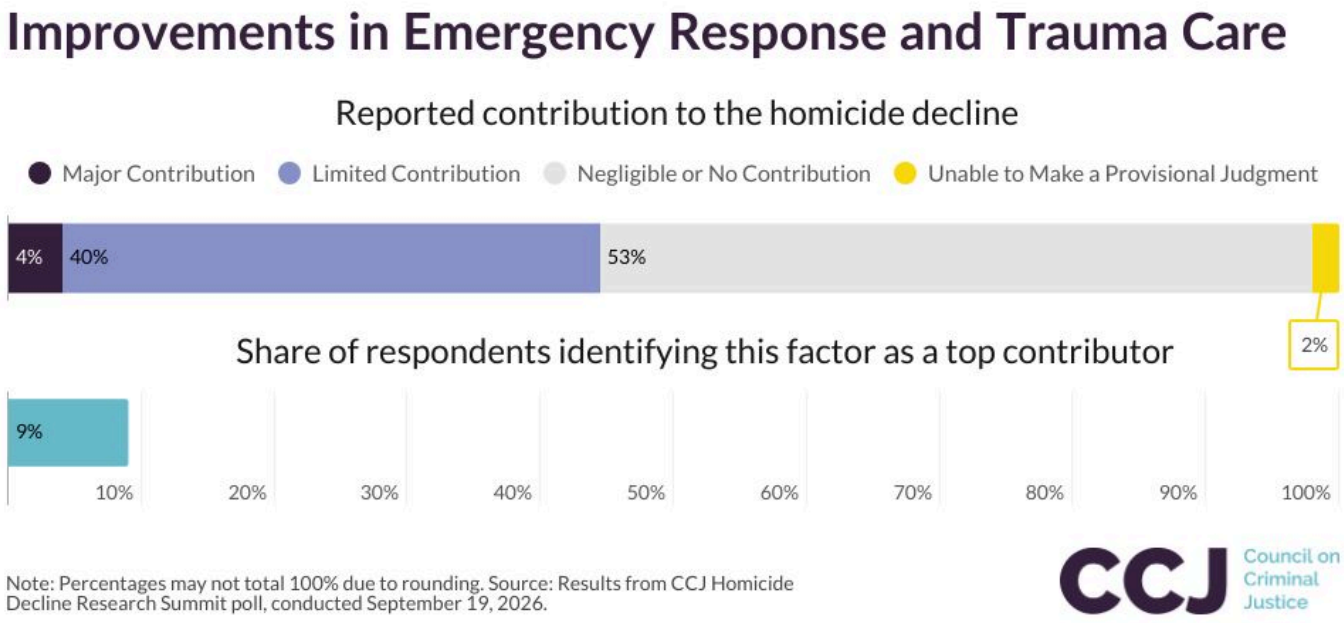
concentrated in census tracts with the greatest disadvantage, while homicide accounted for only a small share of excess mortality overall.[37] The mortality wave peaked in 2020 and 2021, before the steepest homicide declines. Lethality also fell as homicide declined, so fewer homicides could reflect fewer shootings, fewer shootings becoming fatal, or both.[38]

The key questions are whether people who died during the mortality wave were disproportionately drawn from the networks most likely to be involved in later shootings, and whether those networks subsequently experienced fewer shootings, rather than only fewer fatal outcomes.

see full research brief

Participant Comments

You can only die once, and if you kill someone, you will probably only kill once before you are incapacitated. Consider a million excess deaths over the 2020-2022 period. This was a population of people upon whom there were myriad and focused overlapping risks—COVID mortality, less medical access, and more exposed to interpersonal violence (among many others). The wildfire essentially burned out.
Ian Adams
University of South Carolina
There is a limited supply of ready offenders willing to pull the trigger. But I think we should think of this as part and parcel of incapacitation, which also should include those incarcerated, arrested, and remaining in jail, and increased disabilities among the high-risk groups (i.e., young Black men).
Thaddeus Johnson
Council on Criminal Justice



Emergency response and trauma care can affect homicide rates by changing whether people survive serious injuries, especially shootings. The potential homicide connection involves reduced lethality, rather than fewer violent incidents: faster response, bleeding control, trauma-center access, transfusion, surgery, and critical care can increase survival after serious assaults. A 2023 review describes advances across prehospital and hospital trauma care, including hemorrhage control and transfusion practices.[39] Recent U.S. evidence also documents declining firearm-injury mortality along with changes in care and access. In a health-record study spanning the period from 2004 to 2023, mortality among firearm-injury patients fell from 12% to less than 1%, while transfusion use increased from 2% to 11%; the study does not, however, establish what caused the decline in firearm-injury mortality.[40] In Chicago, the opening of a Level I trauma center in 2018 shortened travel time for transported victims by 9.5 minutes and was associated with a 4% decrease in firearm mortality in the surrounding service area.[41]

The key questions are whether the lethality of shootings and other serious assaults declined from 2022 to 2026, and whether advances in emergency response and trauma care contributed to that decline.

Participant Comments

Improvements in emergency response and trauma care in cities such as Chicago, Baltimore, and Washington contributed to declines in homicides. Chicago

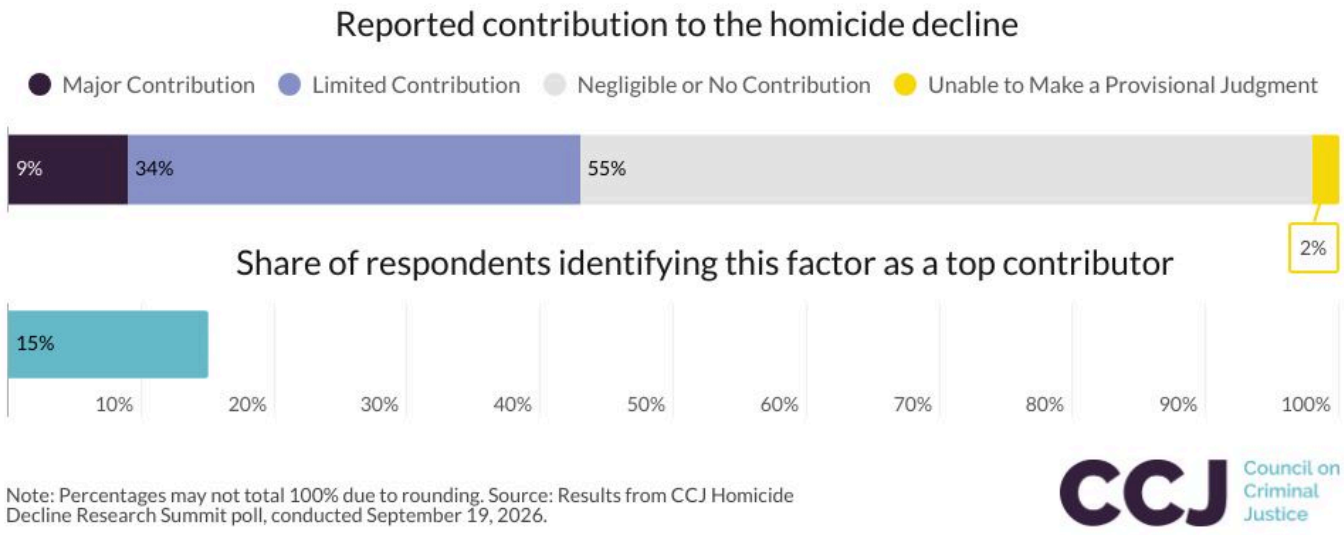
established the first Level I adult trauma center on the Southside, a community with high rates of firearm violence. Baltimore established a network of Level I-III hospitals in their CVI ecosystem. Washington, DC established a Level III trauma center in Ward 8, a community with the highest rate of homicides. Cities and counties also ramped up hospital-based violence intervention programs.

Jo Richardson
University of Maryland

Lethality increased substantially during the pandemic, and then began to wane in 2022. Rates of lethality and homicide seem to track pretty closely over the past five years, suggesting that there is something about “survivability” of injury that has changed meaningfully over the past 4-5 years. If that's indeed the case, the likely culprit is trauma care, EMS response, etc.

Matt Vogel
University at Albany

Stricter Federal Firearm Policy



Federal firearm policy includes laws, regulations, and enforcement practices governing who can legally buy or possess guns and how firearms are sold and transferred. The potential homicide connection is that stricter laws, regulations, or enforcement may make it harder for people at elevated risk of violence to obtain firearms. Federal policy changed in several ways in 2021 and 2022. The federal government increased oversight of gun dealers that violated sales rules; brought some privately made “ghost guns” under federal firearm regulations, requiring serial numbers and background checks in covered sales; created new federal crimes for gun trafficking and buying a gun for someone who cannot legally purchase one;

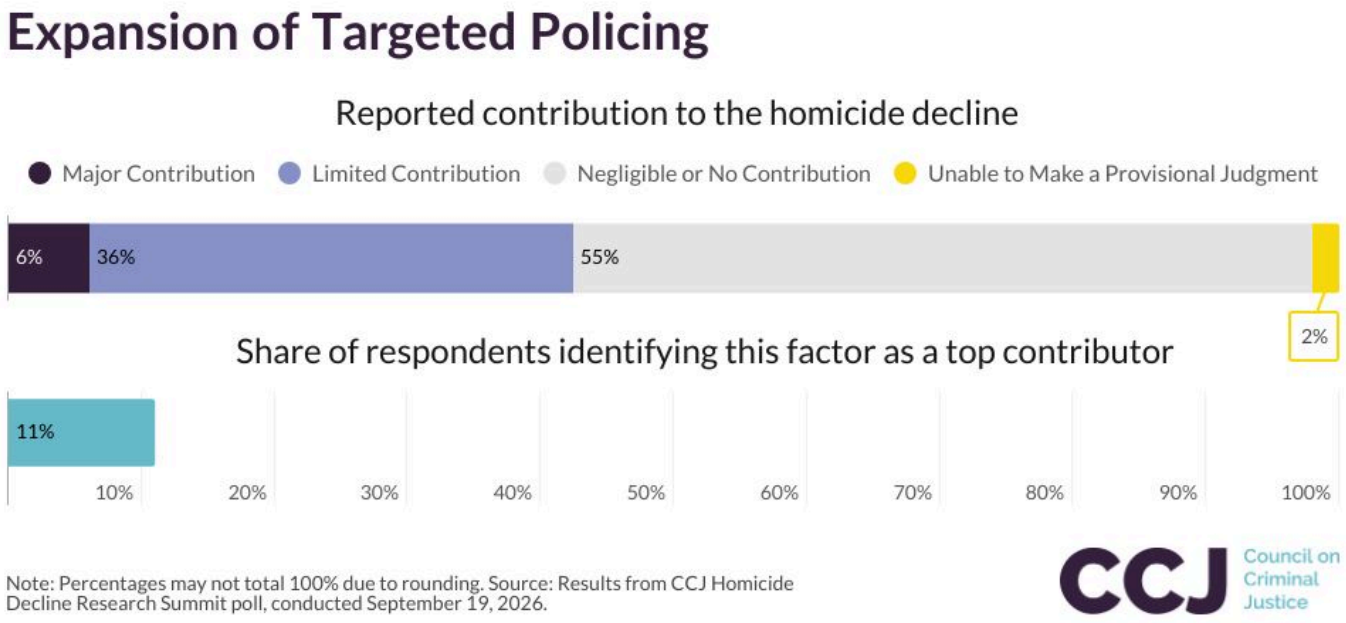
expanded restrictions involving some domestic-violence cases; and added background-check requirements for buyers under 21.[42] Firearms accounted for about 80% of U.S. homicides in 2020 and 2021, and most of the subsequent decline has occurred in gun homicides.[43] Evidence on these changes remains limited. One study of the dealer-enforcement policy found larger firearm-homicide declines where ATF offices issued more warning letters to gun dealers; several other policies have not yet been evaluated.[44]

The key question is whether federal policy changes beginning in 2021 and 2022 changed firearm access or dealer behavior among the people and markets most connected to firearm homicide in ways that contributed to the decline.

see full research brief

Participant Comments

My rating is primarily based on federal ghost gun regulations that created opportunities for enforcement that then led to significant decreases in ghost gun availability. This is particularly important because ghost gun use recovery in crime was most commonly among youth who could not otherwise legally acquire guns and used in homicide and non-fatal shootings. The decline in recovery of ghost guns in crime tracks closely with declines in homicides.
Cass Crifasi
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
Numerous diverse, relevant, and potentially impactful policies went into place close in time to the homicide decline. At the same time, these policies were enacted at the federal level so applied broadly, consistent with the broad nature of the decline across the U.S. Finally, the bulk of the decline is among firearm homicides, which is consistent with this factor.
Charis Kubrin
University of California, Irvine



Targeted policing directs police resources toward the relatively small number of places, people, and networks where serious violence occurs. Hot spots policing, one common approach, focuses patrol and problem-solving on small geographic areas with high levels of crime. The potential homicide connection is that concentrating police activity in these places may increase the perceived likelihood of apprehension and interrupt violent activity. Research generally finds that hot spots policing reduces violence at treated locations. One review found that violent crime was 19% lower, on average, in places where hot spots policing was used.[45] In a randomized St. Louis study, firearm assaults fell 79% in hot spots receiving officer-initiated enforcement, compared with a 24% drop in comparison locations.[46] Dallas experienced a 21% citywide reduction in violent crime relative to comparison cities after adopting a strategy that initially centered on hot spots policing, although its broader crime plan included other targeted approaches.[47] Most evaluations of hot spots policing focus on violent crime or gun assaults at targeted locations, rather than homicide specifically.

The key questions are whether hot spots policing expanded or intensified during the homicide decline in places accounting for substantial firearm violence, and the extent to which changes in violence at those locations contributed to lower homicide at the city level.

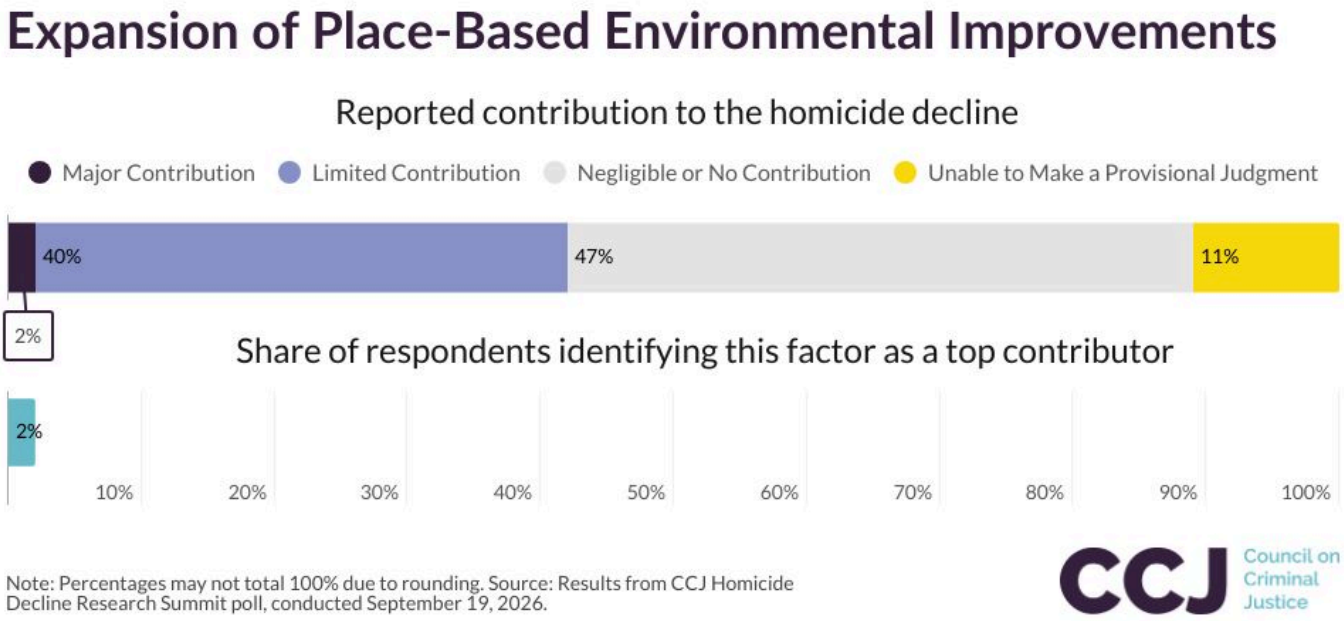
see full research brief

Participant Comments

During the pandemic, targeted policing reduced substantially in large urban areas

with very high levels of nonfatal and fatal shootings, which contributed substantially to the spike. The resumption of targeted policing in 2022-2026 was instrumental in reducing these incidents.

Eric Baumer
University of Maryland, College Park

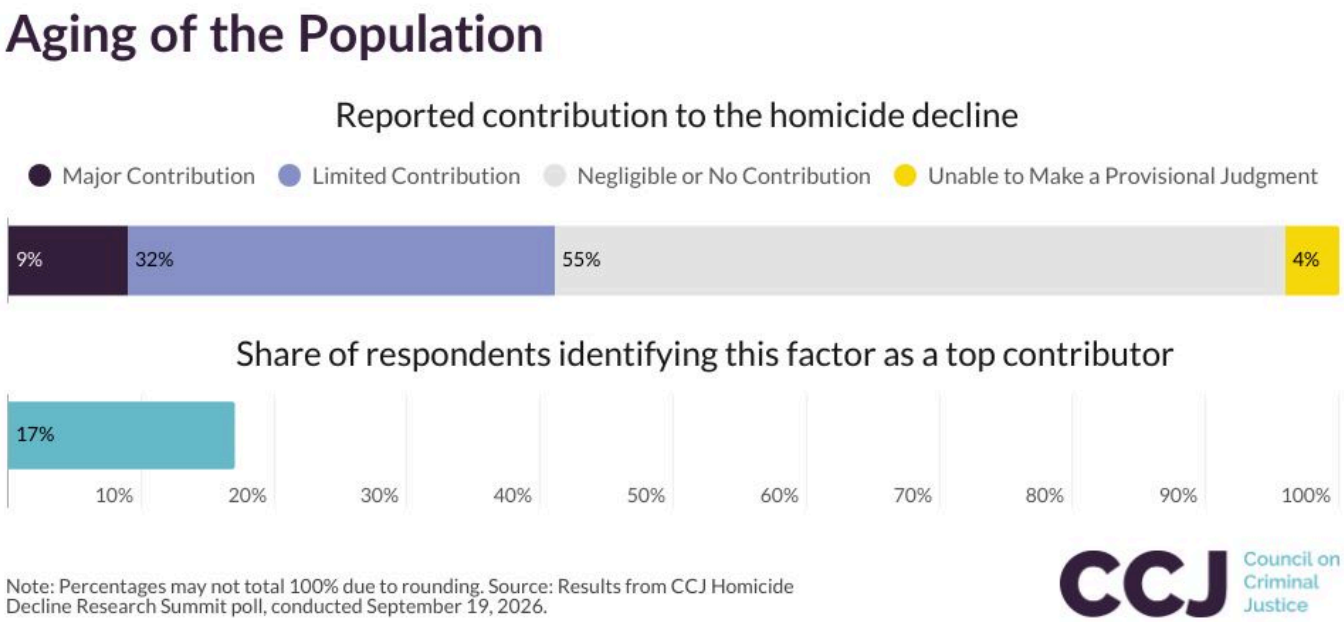


Place-based environmental improvements change neighborhood spaces by greening vacant lots, securing abandoned buildings, improving lighting, or maintaining public areas. The potential homicide connection is that changing physical conditions at places where violence is concentrated may increase visibility, change how residents use space, and reduce opportunities for shootings or other serious violence. Most homicide-specific evidence concerns vacant-property remediation. Across randomized and quasi-experimental studies, greening vacant lots and securing abandoned buildings have generally been associated with reductions in firearm violence, although effects vary by intervention. A meta-analysis of eight studies found reductions in firearm violence of roughly 5% to 6% after vacant-lot greening or the initiation of community gardening, while mowing alone had no pooled effect.[48] Philadelphia trials also found fewer shootings after lot remediation and fewer gun assaults after abandoned-house remediation. Results are less consistent for lighter-touch improvements: A 2023–2024 Philadelphia street-cleaning trial reduced litter but not gun violence significantly, while a street-lighting review found reductions in total crime but not violent crime.[49] Federal pandemic-recovery funds were authorized for use on vacant-property cleanup and remediation, but there is no national measure of how widely these interventions expanded.[50]

The key questions are whether these improvements expanded in places with concentrated gun violence and whether shooting reductions followed.

Participant Comments

The mechanism and evidence is clear that these help reduce gun violence. The expansion of these efforts has occurred in major cities, but I don't believe it was on significant enough scale to explain the decline as well as focused deterrence. Also, the effect sizes of these interventions are too small on their own to explain the decline.
John MacDonald
University of Pennsylvania
Several RCTs and quasi-experimental studies have shown that place-based improvement (vacant lot demolition or remediation, improved street lighting, greening) have reduced violent crime. This can act through removing problematic properties (that can be hubs of deviant behavior) or via the obverse of broken windows. There, however, is no evidence of widespread place-based improvements over the time period, and so it can only potentially be a limited contributor to the homicide decline.
Andrew Wheeler
Crime De-Coder LLC



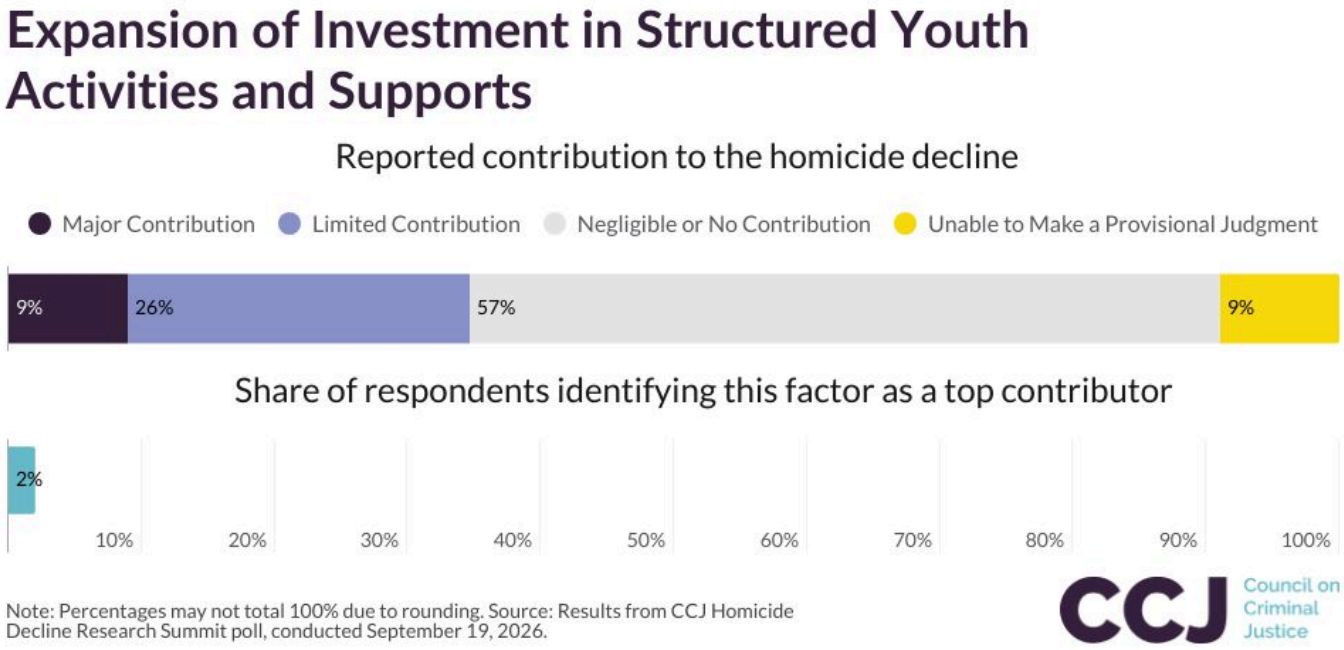
The U.S. population has gradually shifted toward older age groups. The potential homicide

connection is the age structure of the population: Because rates of serious violence generally decline with age, a population with fewer people in younger age groups may have lower homicide rates even if age-specific rates do not change. Young adults are overrepresented on both sides of violent incidents. In 2023, people ages 18 to 29 made up 18% of the population, but accounted for 33% of violent-crime victims and 23% of people identified as responsible for violent incidents; in 2022, homicide rates were highest among people ages 20 to 24.[51] Age structure has shifted gradually rather than uniformly across younger adults: The share of Americans aged 19 to 25 fell from 9.4% in 2013 to 8.6% in 2024, while the share aged 26 to 34 changed little.[52] Because demographic change is gradual, its relationship to homicide may unfold over a longer period rather than beginning with the recent decline.

The key question is how much the decrease in the share of younger people contributed to the homicide decline, compared with decreases in homicide rates among people of the same ages.

Participant Comments

This is likely a very strong driver in the decline in violence over a longer period, but not across a shorter period of time.
Ernesto Lopez
Council on Criminal Justice
The demographic shifts taking place in the U.S. are very consequential for homicide. That we are aging, and have fewer young people, means a smaller group of crime-prone individuals who drive the homicide rate. Moreover, the aging of our society ties into other factors discussed over the last two days that yield increased capacity for police and other criminal justice actors to focus on a smaller group.
María Vélez
University of Maryland, College Park

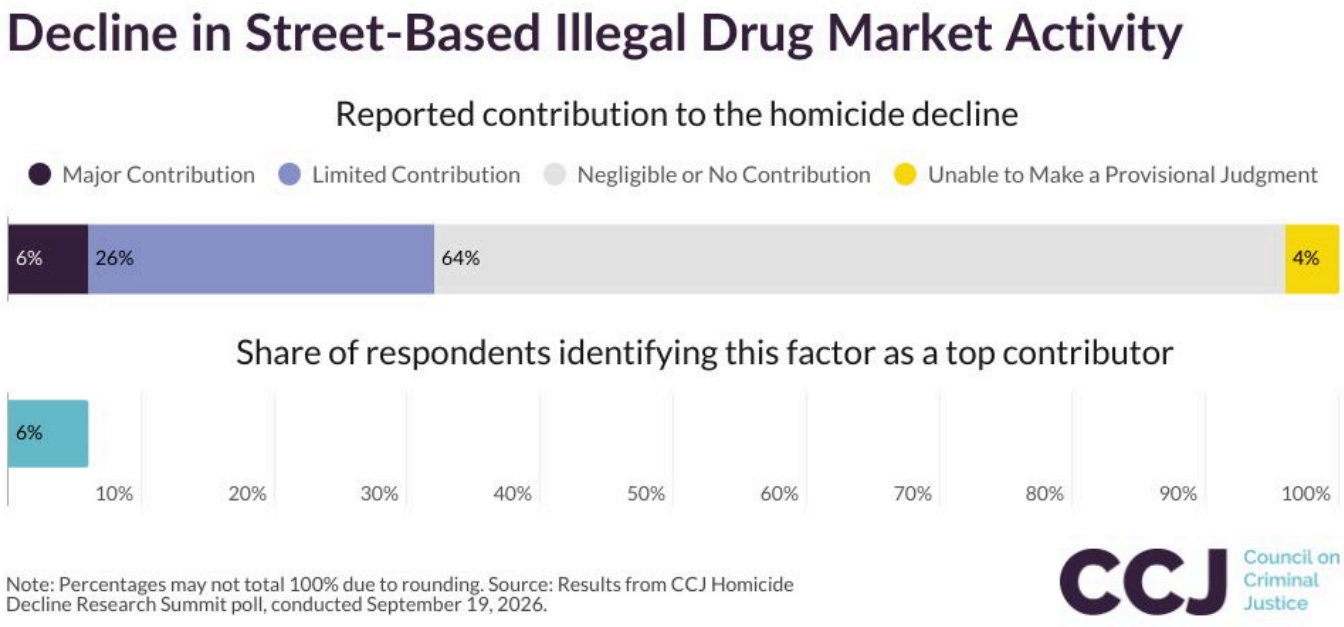


Structured youth activities and supports include summer employment, mentoring, and afterschool and summer programs that provide supervised activities, relationships with adults, and connections to school or work. The potential homicide connection is that these programs may reduce unsupervised time and opportunities for conflict while providing skills and relationships that can influence violent behavior after participation ends. Most research measures violent arrests or arraignments, delinquency, or antisocial behavior, rather than homicide. Across summer employment programs, randomized evaluations in Chicago and Boston found reductions in violent-crime arrests or arraignments, including effects that extended beyond the summer; a 2024 systematic review, however, found no overall reduction in violent arrests, charges, or other justice-system outcomes across programs.[53] Research on broader afterschool programs is also mixed: A meta-analysis of 12 studies found a small, statistically nonsignificant reduction in delinquency or antisocial behavior.[54] Federal pandemic-recovery funds supported expanded afterschool and summer offerings beginning in 2021, but national afterschool participation was 13% in 2025, compared with 18% in 2014.[55]

The key question is whether increased investment in structured youth activities and supports led to greater participation among young people at elevated risk of serious violence during the homicide decline.

Participant Comments

If youth have a higher risk for involvement in lifestyles that increase the odds of lethality, keeping them busy with pro-social activities has the potential of limiting the time they have to engage in activities that increase risk. Idle hands make the devil’s playmate. An added benefit is that these youths may be exposed to opportunities and belief systems that can stick with them through early adulthood and decrease risk.
Jesenia Pizarro
Arizona State University
Since most violence (including homicide) typically occurs among the young, the investment in youth supports during the period in question and the resulting bridges built among community service providers hopefully results in lasting relationships that operate together to address and reduce youth violence.
Jeffrey Sedgwick
Bureau of Justice Statistics/Office of Justice Programs (ret.)



Street-based illegal drug markets involve people buying and selling drugs in person, often in public places or other face-to-face settings. The potential homicide connection is that disputes over territory, debts, or drug quality can become violent, and sellers carrying cash or drugs can be targets for robbery. People involved in these markets may also carry guns for protection, creating more opportunities for disputes or robberies to escalate into lethal violence. During the crack cocaine era of the 1980s, street markets expanded and drew more

young people into drug selling; increases in youth homicide followed the arrival of crack markets across cities.[56] Today’s drug markets differ. Fentanyl and methamphetamine play larger roles, and some sales have shifted online, although cash-based markets still account for most retail transactions involving illegal stimulants and opioids.[57] It is difficult to track whether street-based activity has changed in recent years. A federal program that measured drug use and spending among people who were arrested ended in 2013, and the most recent national estimates of frequent drug use and retail spending are from 2016.[58]

The key questions are whether street-based drug selling declined during the homicide drop in places where drug-market violence was concentrated, and whether violence connected to those markets changed as well.

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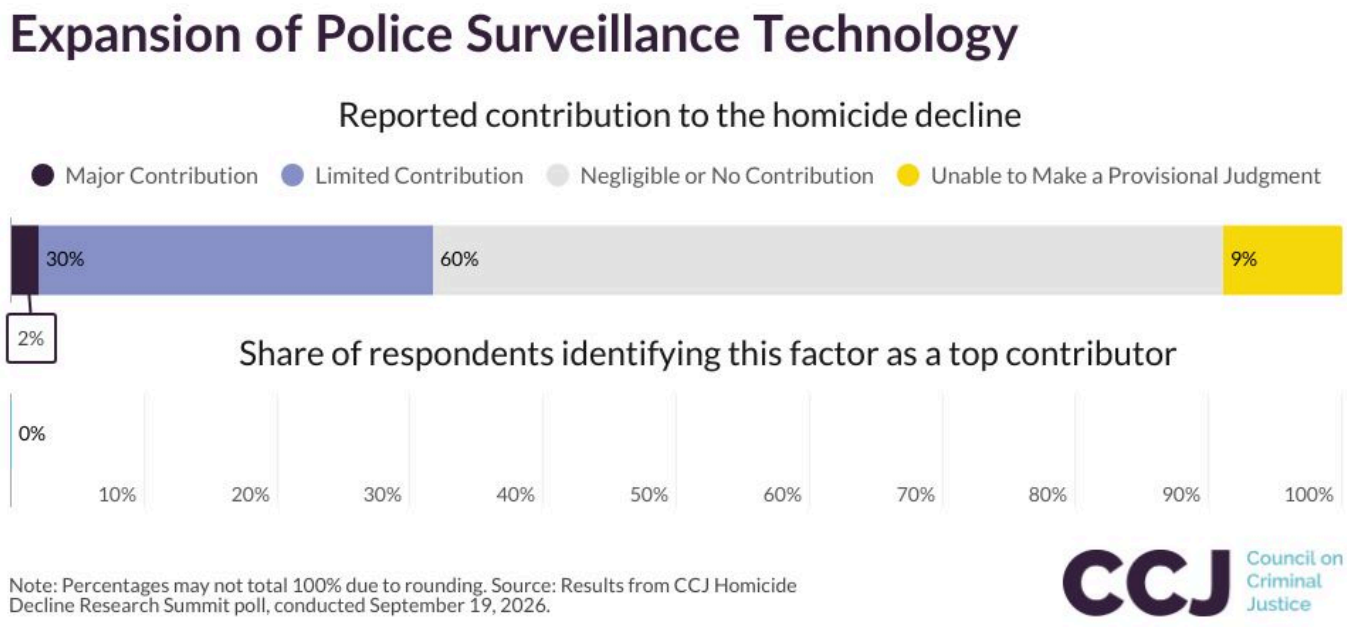


Police surveillance technology includes closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras that record or monitor public places, automated license plate readers (ALPRs) that scan vehicle plates, and real-time crime centers that combine information from multiple technologies. The potential homicide connection is that surveillance may deter violence by increasing the perceived likelihood of detection or may help police identify and apprehend people involved in serious violence. A systematic review found that CCTV was associated with a 13% reduction in crime overall but no significant reduction in violent crime. Crime reductions were larger when cameras were actively monitored and paired with police patrol or other interventions.[59] Studies of ALPRs have generally found no additional deterrent effect beyond

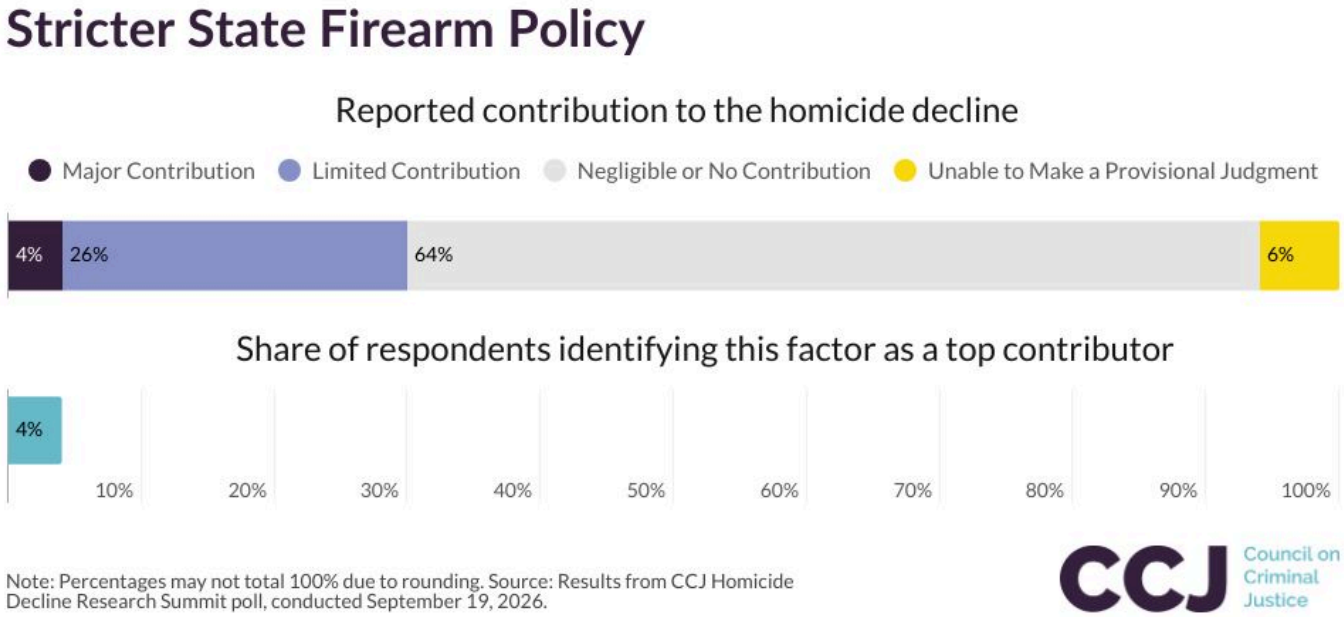
police patrol, and one study found no significant change in shooting clearance rates after a major expansion.[60] Real-time crime centers combine technologies such as cameras, ALPRs, and gunshot detection with crime analysis and police response. In Chicago, real-time crime centers were associated with about a 5% increase in violent-crime clearance rates, and nonfatal shootings in districts with an active center were 19% to 24% more likely to be cleared.[61] By 2025, about 300 law enforcement agencies—less than 1% of the U.S. total—operated real-time crime centers.[62]

The key question is whether surveillance expanded from 2022 to 2026 in ways that increased detection, police response, or the likelihood of solving serious violence.

see full research brief

Participant Comments

Surveillance may have helped reduce homicides in some cities, but there is little evidence that it played a major role in the national decline. Cameras and license-plate readers are widespread, yet research has not consistently linked them to fewer killings. Studies of facial recognition and real-time crime centers offer some promise, particularly for identifying suspects and improving investigations. What remains unclear is whether those investigative gains helped prevent further killings, particularly during the decline after 2022.
Thaddeus Johnson
Council on Criminal Justice

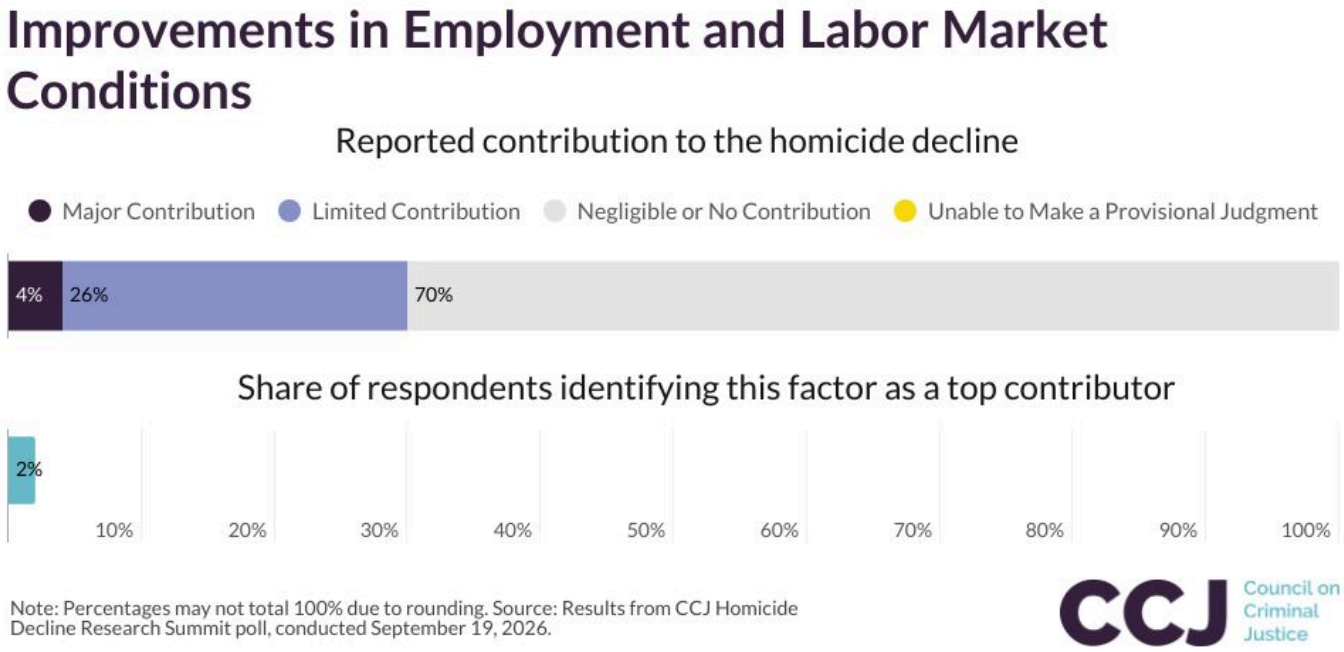


State firearm policy governs who can buy and possess guns, how firearms are sold, and when they may be carried in public. While federal law sets a national baseline, states may add some restrictions and, in many states, limit further regulation by local governments. State approaches therefore vary widely, and individual states can tighten some rules while loosening others. The potential homicide connection is that laws affecting firearm access and carrying may change how readily guns are available during potentially violent encounters. A 2024 study found that permit-to-purchase laws were associated with 18% lower firearm homicide rates, while universal background checks without a permit requirement were not associated with lower homicide.[63] A 2024 research review found moderate evidence that firearm prohibitions tied to domestic violence restraining orders reduced intimate-partner homicide, and limited evidence that waiting periods reduced firearm homicide. It also found supportive evidence that less restrictive “shall-issue” concealed-carry laws increased firearm homicide, while evidence on permitless carry was inconclusive.[64]

The key questions are which state firearm policies were in place or changed before and during the homicide decline, how those policies differed across states contributing most to the national decline, and how firearm homicide changed as policies had time to take effect.

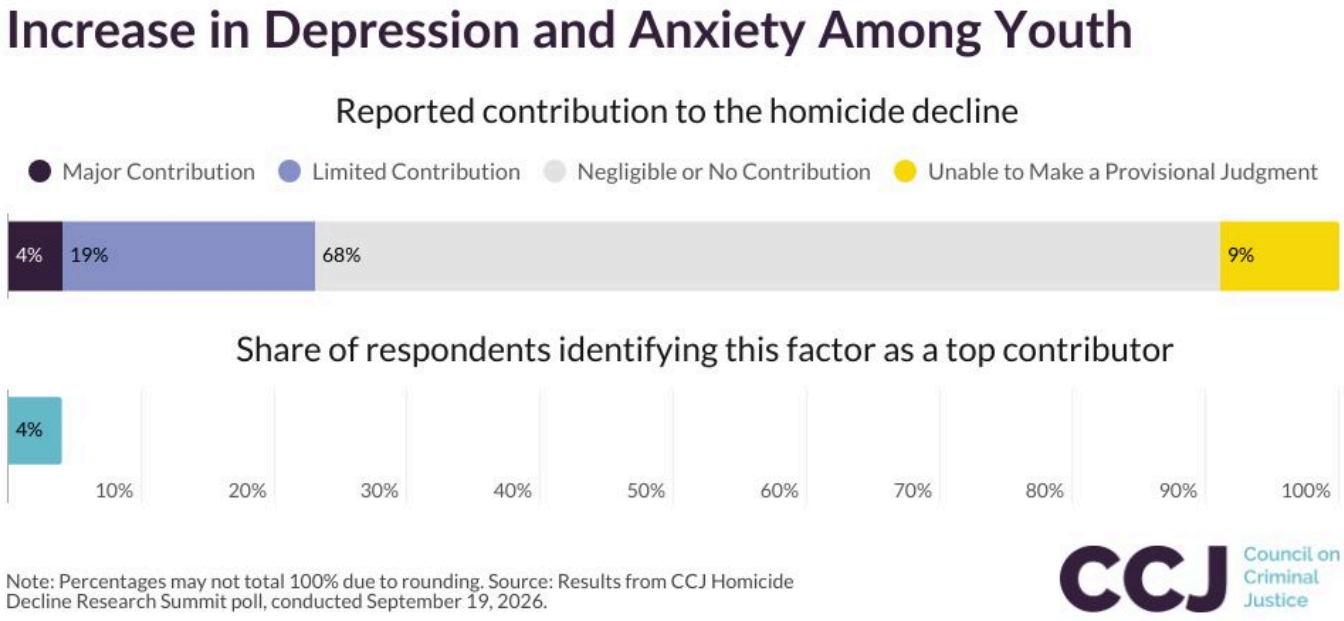
Participant Comments

Since the decline in homicide was experienced powerfully across all states, it is unlikely that changes in state firearm policy played an important role in this decline—since some states were getting more permissive toward firearms while other states were becoming more stringent.
John Donohue
Stanford University
While few firearm policies were enacted during this period, implementation and enforcement likely increased. For example, the Oxford High School shooting in Michigan led to prosecution of parents who provided a firearm to a minor who used it to commit a crime. We’ve seen more prosecutions like this, and there may be more safe storage because of it.
April Zeoli
University of Michigan



Improved employment and labor market conditions can increase access to work, earnings, and economic stability. The potential homicide connection is that increased access to jobs or higher wages may reduce financial strain, change daily routines, and increase the benefits of legal work relative to illegal activity. Research generally finds that better labor-market opportunities are associated with lower crime, although relationships are more consistent for property crime and robbery than for homicide and other serious violence.[65] U.S. studies also find that employment effects vary across places, populations, and types of work, making national unemployment or wage measures an incomplete indicator of the conditions experienced by people at elevated risk of violence.[66] When homicide began declining in 2022, employers were competing for a relatively limited supply of workers, job openings were plentiful, and wages were rising relatively quickly.[67] Over the next several years, job openings declined and wage growth slowed as the labor market moved closer to pre-pandemic conditions, while homicide continued to fall.[68]

The key question is whether improvements in jobs, wages, or labor demand reached people and places at elevated risk of serious violence during the homicide decline.



Depression and anxiety among youth rose before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, with diagnosis rates highest among older adolescents and young adults.[69] The potential homicide connection is that worsening depression and anxiety may change how young people interact with peers and respond to stress, affecting exposure to or participation in interpersonal conflict. Across qualitative studies of young people with depression, social withdrawal and loneliness were among the most commonly reported experiences, which could alter how much time youth spent in situations where conflicts begin or escalate.[70] Research does not show a consistent relationship between depression and later violence: A 2025 review of 36 longitudinal studies found positive, null, and mixed results.[71] Depression and anxiety can also coexist with irritability and anger, which for some young people can include emotional outbursts or aggressive responses to perceived threats.[72] Some national indicators also improved during the homicide decline. Persistent sadness or hopelessness among high school students fell from 40% in 2023 to 33% in 2025, while major depressive episodes among people ages 18 to 25 fell from 20% in 2022 to 14% in 2025.[73]

The key questions are how changes in depression and anxiety affected behavior among young people at highest risk of serious violence, whether those effects increased or reduced exposure to interpersonal conflict, and how their timing aligns with the homicide decline.

Participant Comments

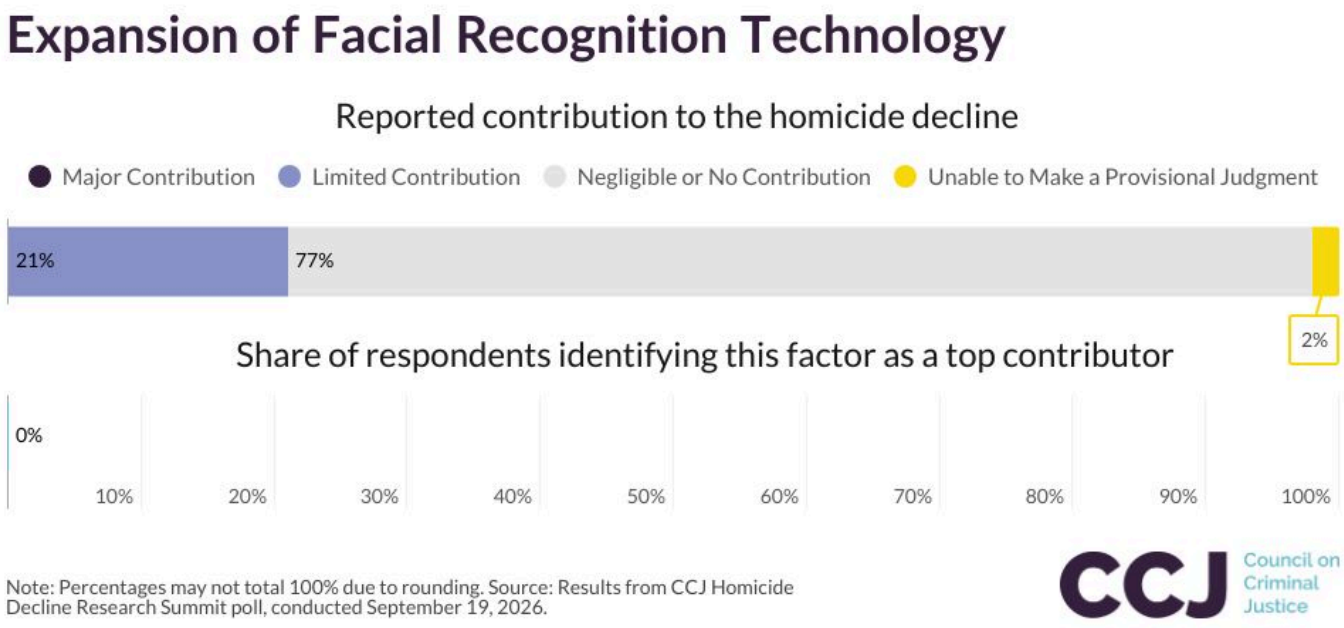
The premise that internalizing symptoms (anxiety, depression) suppress violent

behavior is false. People at high risk for repeated involvement in violence often show both externalizing and internalizing problems—one of the hallmarks of violence is poorly regulated negative affect, including anxiety, depression, and hostility. There is a mismatch in this factor between population-level phenomena and the small group where violence gets concentrated.

Jennifer Skeem
University of California, Berkeley

The increases in depression and anxiety among youth, as well as suicidality and suicide among disadvantaged youth, may address issues of scale, since a steep decline occurred during the pandemic and persisted. Internalizing behaviors associated with depression especially are less likely to lead to violence and more likely to lead to self-harm. The data plays out in that way. There is an additive effect of compounding trauma experience, particularly among youth who are most at risk with a lot of death occurring around them during COVID, for various reasons. This can impact long-term impact on life and lead to more depression and suicidal ideation.

Laura Vargas
University of Colorado School of Medicine



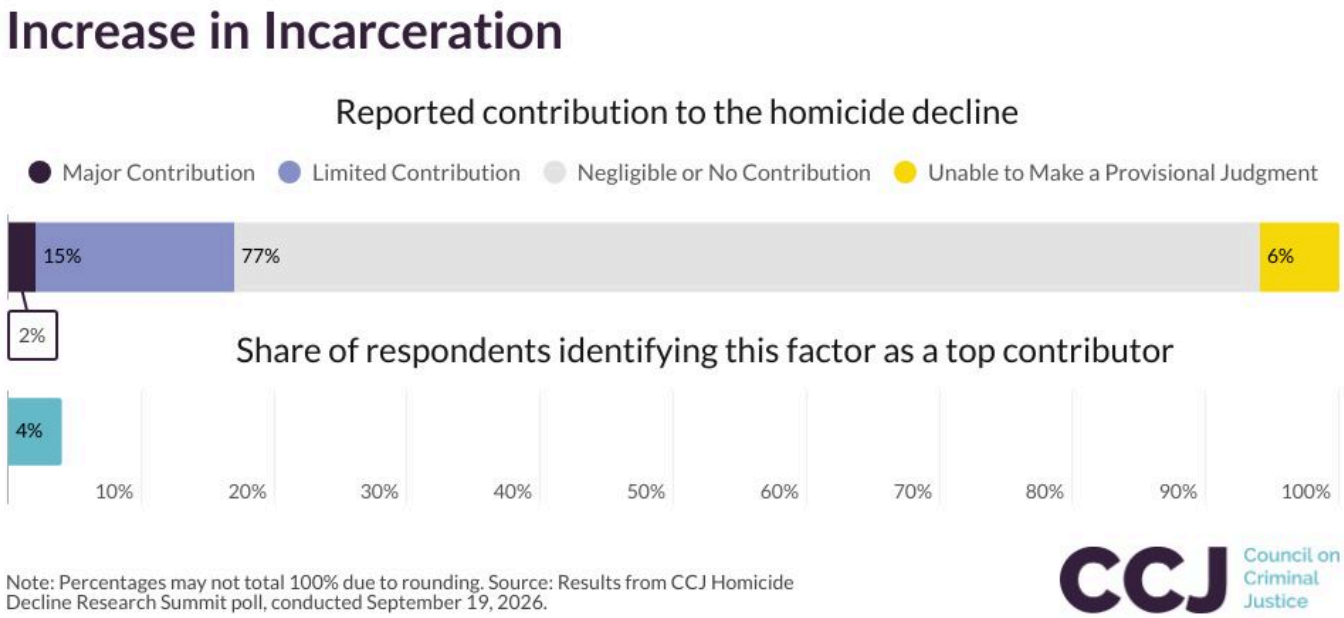
Facial recognition technology compares face images against databases to help police identify people, typically as an investigative lead rather than a standalone basis for arrest. The potential homicide connection is that facial recognition may help identify people from crime-scene images, support arrests in homicide and shooting cases, prevent repeat violence

through incapacitation, or increase the perceived likelihood of detection and apprehension. One quasi-experimental study of 268 U.S. cities from 1997 to 2020 found that police adoption of facial recognition technology was associated with a 14% reduction in homicide; effects on overall violent crime were not statistically significant in the primary model.[74] Recent systematic and scoping reviews identify relatively few studies examining facial recognition’s effects on investigations or crime outcomes, and findings remain mixed.[75] In addition, national data do not show how police use of facial recognition may have changed during the homicide decline.

The key question is whether expanded use of facial recognition in serious-violence investigations from 2022 to 2026 was associated with more identifications or apprehensions in homicide and shooting cases.

Participant Comments

The use expanded but should not be considered in isolation from surveillance cameras and the amount of resources committed to homicide investigations. This is also a catalyst for more targeted policing of high-risk people and networks. The effects have been shown to appreciate over time among long-term users. So, while there was no 2020 shock in adoption, more queries and more skilled officers are using these technologies in investigations.
Thaddeus Johnson
Council on Criminal Justice



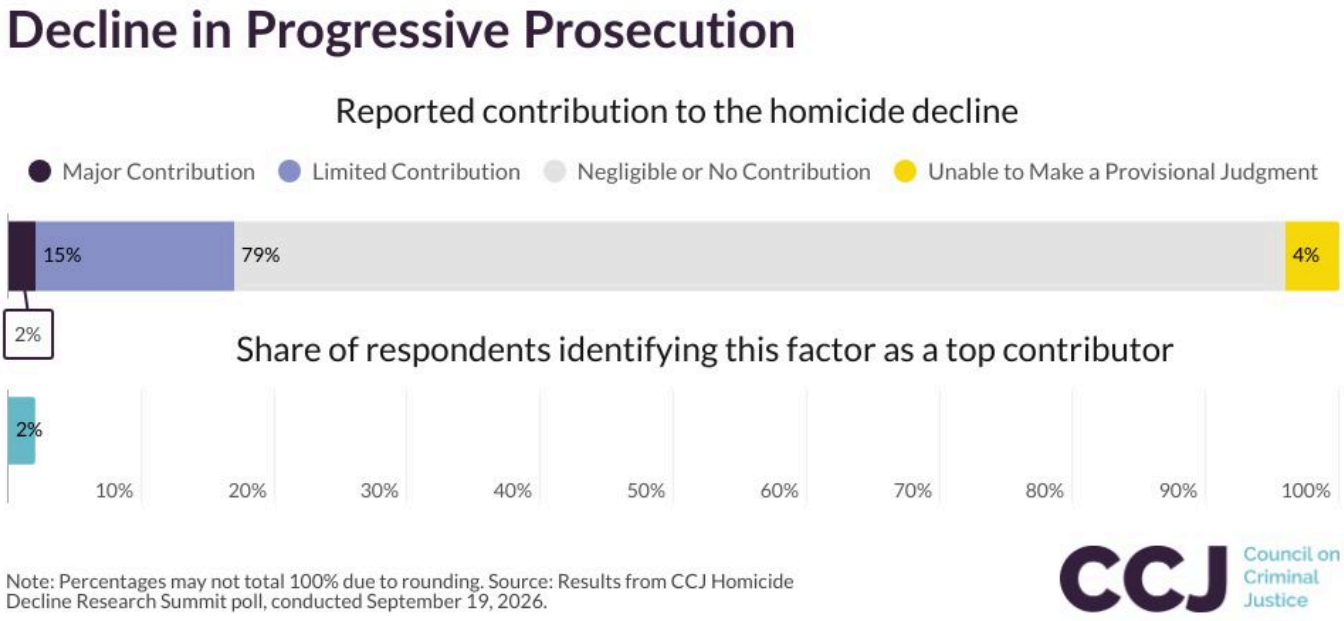
Incarceration refers to confinement in jail or prison. The potential homicide connection is that confinement can prevent people from committing violence in the community, while the prospect of confinement may deter violence if people believe punishment is likely and will come quickly. A National Academies review concluded that incarceration likely reduced crime overall, but could not estimate the size of the effect.[76] Incarceration fell sharply in 2020 and 2021 and then partially rebounded, although prison and jail populations have remained below 2019 levels.[77] Between the 2021 low point and the most recent data from 2023 and 2024, about 93,000 more people were confined on an average day, while homicides fell by about 6,000. Based on observed rates of serious offending, the additional confinement could account for 0.1% to 3.1% of that decline.[78] Jail populations largely finished rebounding in 2022, before the steepest homicide declines. Research suggests that certainty of punishment matters more than severity, but national data do show how much the likelihood of detention following arrests changed during this period.[79]

The key questions are whether the post-pandemic rebound in confinement made punishment more certain or faster for people involved in serious violence, and whether that change contributed to the homicide decline.

see full research brief

Participant Comments

For the first time in more than a decade, the incarcerated population in the country grew two years in a row. That increase need not be large for the effect on homicide to be significant through the mechanism of incapacitation—by which I'm referring to the removal of *both* potential perpetrators *and* potential victims. The incapacitation effects are well-documented, as are the effects on mortality risk for incarcerated offenders. If the increase in incarceration was concentrated among offenders at the right tail of the risk distributions for both perpetration and victimization (which may be likelier than in years past, given post-2016 criminal justice reforms adopted nationwide), then this could hold significant explanatory power.
Rafael Mangual
Manhattan Institute



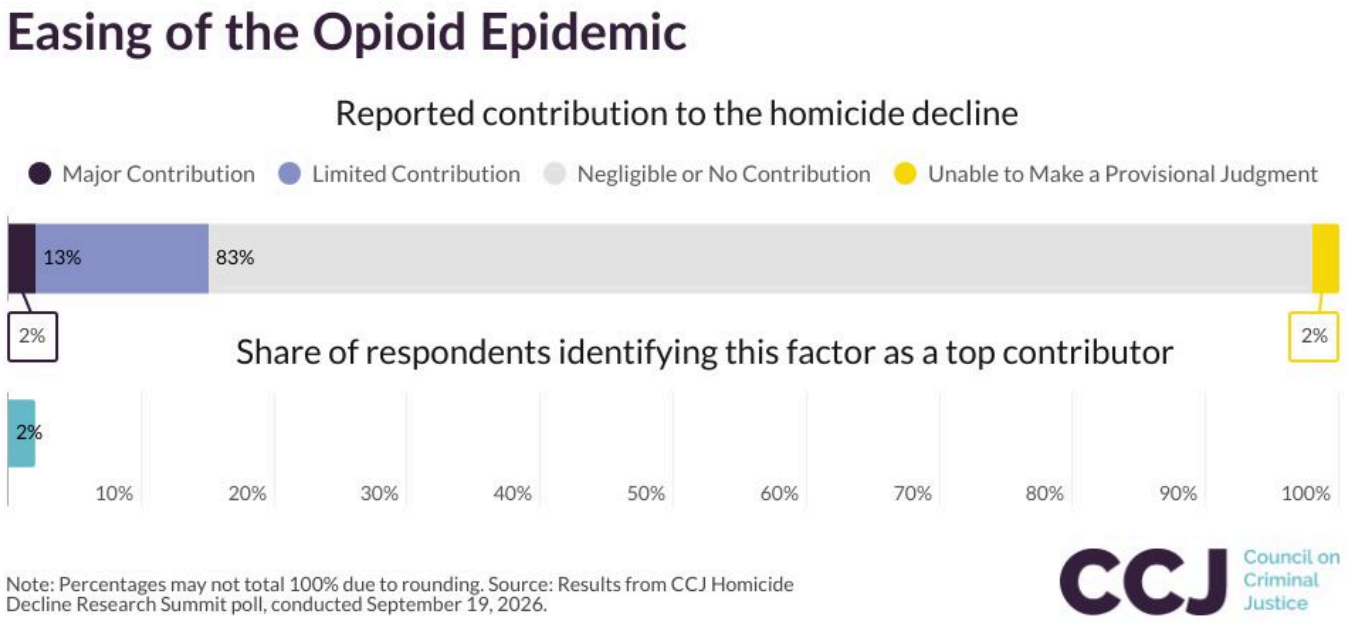
Progressive prosecution is an umbrella term for a set of locally implemented reforms, rather than a single policy, that can include declining some low-level cases, expanding diversion, reducing use of cash bail, and limiting some charging or sentencing practices. The potential connection to homicide is not one-directional: Reduced prosecution or punishment may lessen deterrence or incapacitation, while reducing low-level system contact may avoid disruptions to employment, housing, treatment, or family ties—or allow prosecutors to direct more resources toward serious violence. Recent research has not found a consistent effect on violent crime. One working paper found that reform-minded prosecutors reduced charging and convictions primarily for nonviolent misdemeanors, with no statistically significant changes in reported overall, violent, property, or homicide crime rates.[80] A study of the 100 largest counties covering the 2000 to 2020 period found higher property and total index crime after progressive prosecutors took office, but no reliable overall effect on violent crime.[81] The movement expanded substantially during the 2010s, but the policies adopted vary across offices.[82]

The key question is whether prosecutorial changes during the decline affected serious violence directly—through charging, detention, pleas, or witness cooperation—or indirectly by freeing time and resources to focus more on homicide, shootings, and other high-harm cases.

Participant Comments

There was a massive shift in the last few years in "progressive" prosecution. Many

of the jurisdictions accounting for meaningful shares of the homicide decline have seen "progressive" prosecutors leave office: Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, Baltimore, Chicago, Tampa, Athens, etc. If these shifts produced harsher decisions with respect to prosecution rates, pretrial detention rates, and post-conviction imprisonment rates among those at the right tail, then that would be consistent with this trend constituting a partial explanation for the decline.
Rafael Mangual
Manhattan Institute



The opioid epidemic refers to widespread opioid use disorder and fatal overdoses, driven in recent years largely by illicit fentanyl. The potential homicide connection is indirect: Financial pressures associated with severe opioid addiction can lead to theft, robbery, or other crimes that sometimes become violent. Opioids themselves are depressants and are not associated with increased aggression, unlike methamphetamine, alcohol, and PCP.[83] National survey data show that the share of the population with opioid use disorder remained around 2% in recent years, even as fatal overdoses fell sharply after 2022.[84] The two measures can move differently because overdose deaths can fall when opioid use becomes less likely to be fatal, without a corresponding decline in addiction. Naloxone, which can reverse an overdose, has become much more widely available, with distribution rising from 7.7 million units in 2018 to 29.7 million in 2023.[85] The geography of the two trends also differed: Overdose trends varied substantially across regions and states, while homicide declined more broadly.[86]

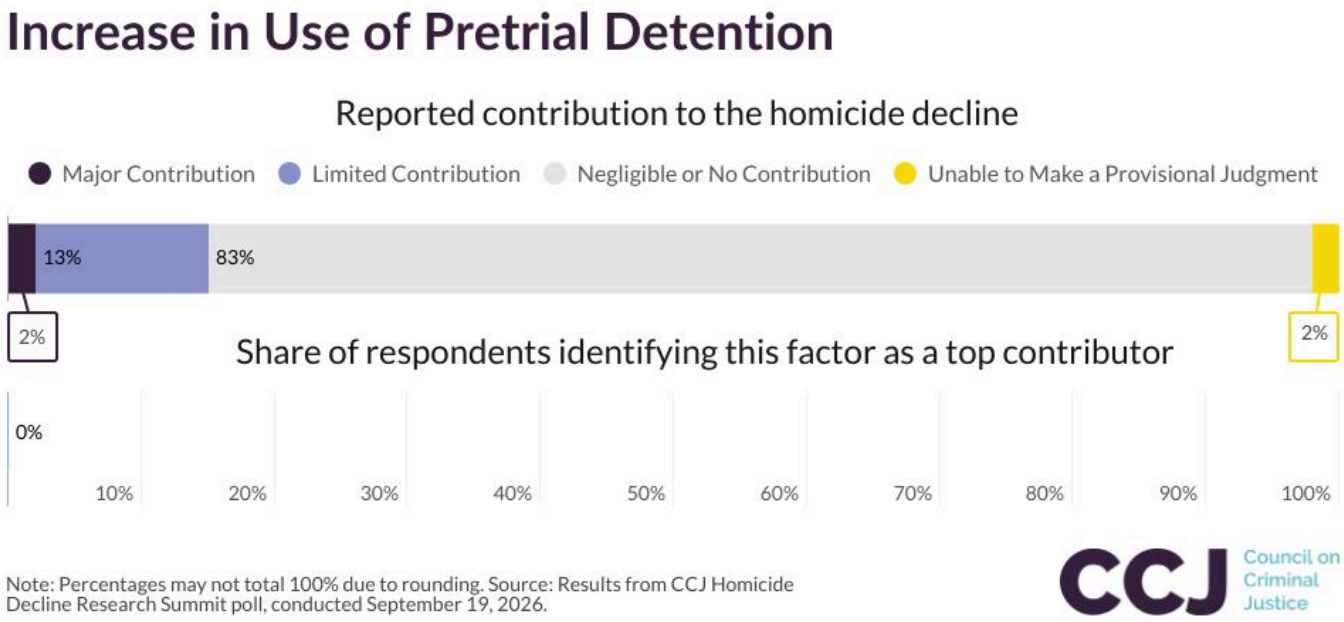
The key questions are whether opioid use disorder or addiction-related financial pressures

declined after 2022 among people and drug markets most connected to serious violence, and whether changes in those concentrated settings contributed to the national homicide decline.

see full research brief

Participant Comments

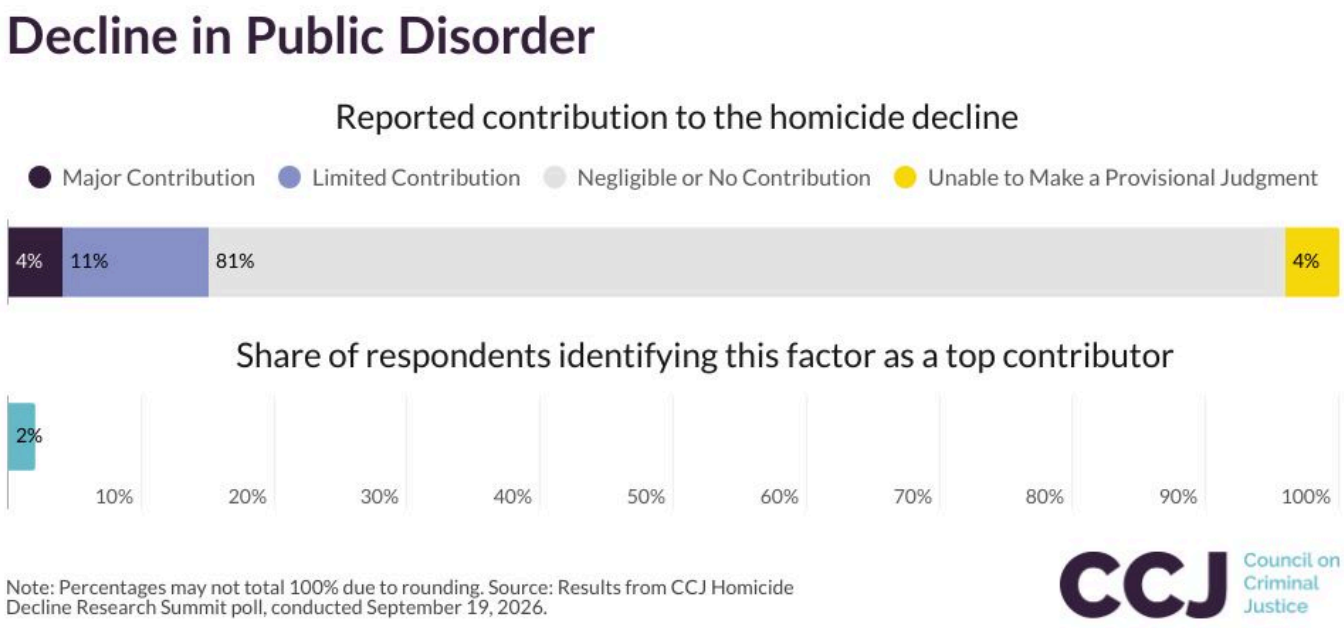
Opioid use tends to depress activity, including violence; most opioid markets are covert and largely non-violent; and overt opioid markets are relatively rare, generally not particularly violent, and do not make a substantial contribution to national levels of homicide and gun violence. Any easing of the epidemic is thus unlikely to be meaningful in terms of the national decline in homicide.
David Kennedy
John Jay College of Criminal Justice
Multiple studies at the county level have found links between opioid mortality and homicide. The timing of the increase and decline in overdose deaths matches that of homicide trends. The missing link is the mechanism, not evidence of the association.
James Tuttle
University of Montana



Bail reform changes how courts determine who is released or detained before trial, often by reducing reliance on money bail or changing when detention is available. The potential homicide connection can run in different directions: Greater detention can reduce offending

while people are confined and may deter some offending, but detention can also disrupt housing, employment, treatment, and family ties in ways associated with later offending. Research reflects these competing pathways: Detention reduces offending while cases are pending, but some studies find those short-term effects are offset by higher offending after release.[87] Policy evaluations, including quasi-experimental analyses in New York and New Jersey, generally have not found increases in violent crime, firearm violence, or homicide attributable to bail reforms.[88] During the homicide decline, pretrial policy did not move in a single direction. New York, for example, expanded the circumstances in which some defendants could be detained, while Illinois eliminated money bail statewide but retained detention for certain cases.[89]

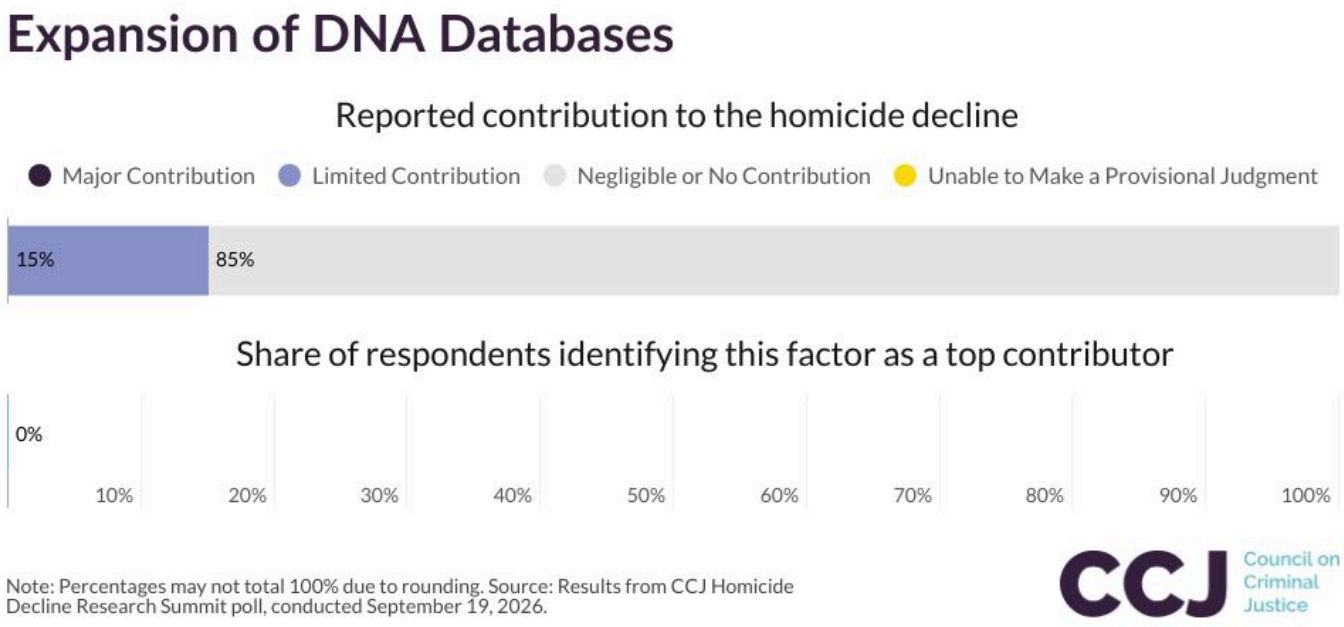
The key questions are whether greater use of pretrial detention reached people at elevated risk of serious violence and whether those changes were followed by reductions in serious violence.



Public disorder includes visible activity in shared spaces; such activity ranges from public intoxication or drug use to fights, disturbances, and other nuisance behavior. The potential homicide connection is that lower levels of recurring disorder may change how public spaces are used and monitored and reduce settings where conflicts or other serious violence can develop. Research has not established that disorder itself causes violence. A large Chicago study found that disorder and violent crime largely reflected common neighborhood conditions, while a review of 96 other studies found no consistent evidence that disorder

increases aggression.[90] Intervention research points to a somewhat different relationship: A 2024 meta-analysis found reductions in violent crime when police and communities addressed recurring disorder problems, with larger effects for community and problem-solving approaches than for more enforcement-focused tactics.[91] There is no consistent national measure showing whether public disorder is increasing or decreasing, and common indicators such as complaints, calls for service, and enforcement activity also reflect reporting and policing practices.[92]

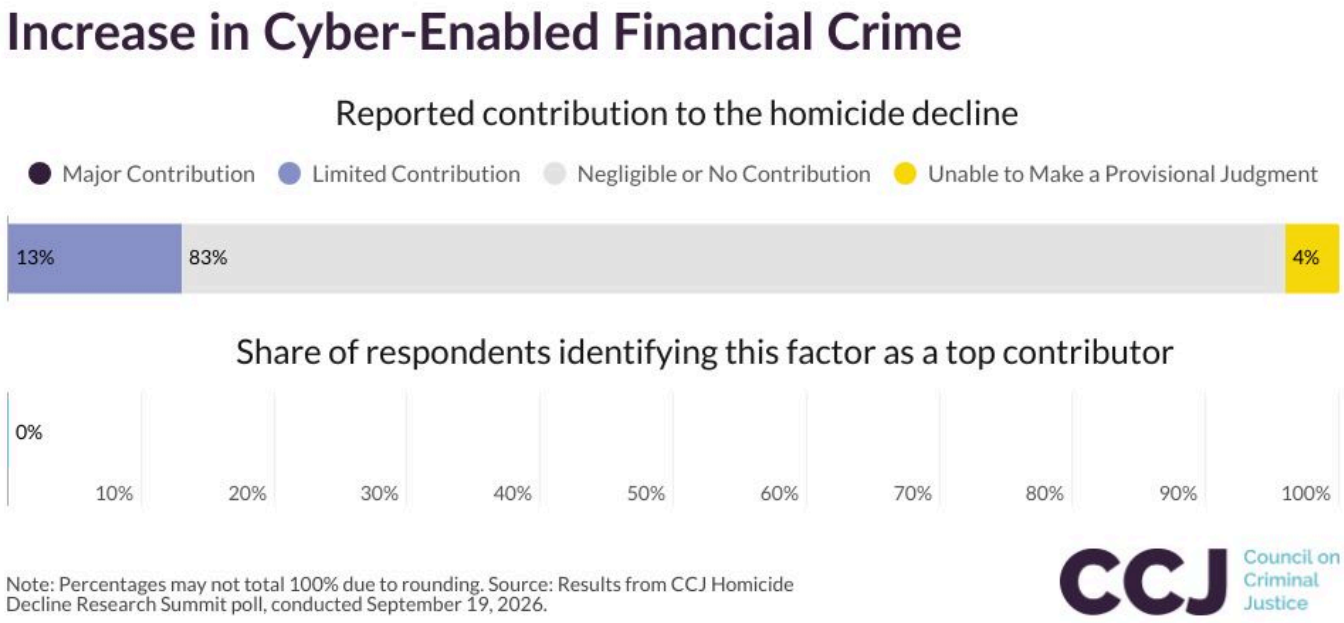
The key question is whether reductions in recurring public disorder were followed by lower levels of serious violence, especially in places where those problems were concentrated.



DNA databases allow police to compare crime-scene biological evidence with stored profiles and link evidence across crimes. The potential homicide connection is that broader searchable DNA coverage may generate investigative leads in serious crimes, support arrests that prevent repeat violence, and increase the perceived likelihood of detection. U.S. research exploiting changes in state DNA collection requirements found that database inclusion reduced the likelihood of a new conviction within five years by about 17% among people convicted of serious violent offenses, and that larger databases were associated with lower violent crime rates.[93] Homicide-specific evidence is thinner and focuses mainly on investigations: A Cleveland study found no overall relationship between a DNA match and homicide clearance, although effects varied across case circumstances.[94] Nationally, combined offender and arrestee profiles grew from about 19.4 million in October 2021 to

26.8 million in June 2026, a 38% increase, though some profiles belong to incarcerated people not at risk of community violence.[95]

The key questions are whether searchable DNA coverage expanded among people who were in the community and at risk of serious violence, and whether that growth increased detection or reduced repeat violence during the homicide decline.



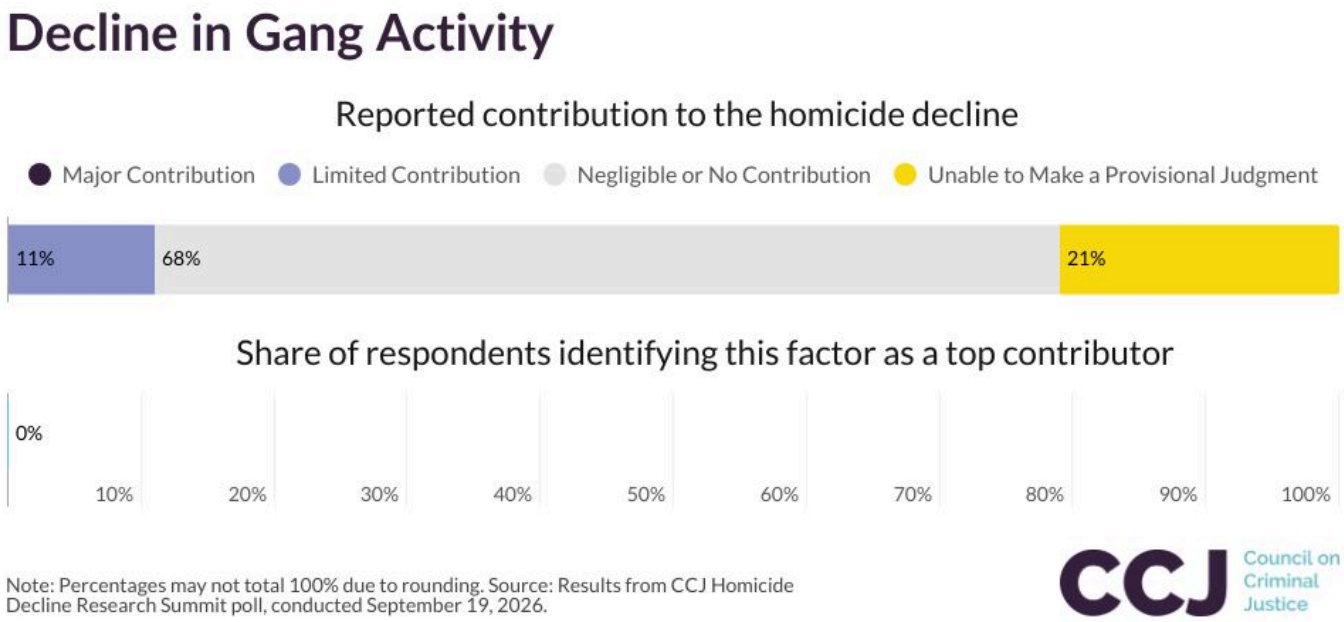
Cyber-enabled financial crime includes online fraud, identity theft, account takeover, and related crimes used to obtain money or financial information. The potential homicide connection involves substitution: If some financially motivated crime shifts from robbery or other in-person acquisitive crime to remote online activity, fewer in-person thefts and confrontations could mean fewer opportunities for serious violence. Research has not established that people engaged in traditional acquisitive crime routinely shift to cyber-enabled financial crime, and online and offline offending can overlap.[96] Reported internet crime increased during the homicide decline: Complaints to the FBI rose from about 800,000 in 2022 to more than 1 million in 2025, while reported losses doubled from $10.3 billion to $20.9 billion.[97] Some cyber-enabled financial crime affecting U.S. victims originates outside the U.S., although the exact share is unknown. The U.S. Department of the Treasury estimates that Americans lost at least $10 billion in 2024 to scam operations based in Southeast Asia alone, up 66% from the prior year.[98]

The key questions are whether growth in cyber-enabled financial crime coincided with a shift away from in-person acquisitive crime in the U.S., and whether any such shift reduced violent

encounters that could otherwise have resulted in homicide.

Participant Comments

I would bundle this factor with decline in cash use, as both reflect changes in opportunities for felony homicide, which represent the bulk of the decline during the time period (vs. more expressive or argument-based homicides). If much acquisitive crime is moving online (increase in cyber-enabled financial crime) and people out and about on the streets are not carrying cash, opportunities for robberies to go awry and turn into homicides is greatly diminished. Timing makes sense here as the last several years have seen massive changes in both factors.
Charis Kubrin
University of California, Irvine



Gang activity is one context in which serious violence concentrates. The potential homicide connection is that gang involvement can increase exposure to violent conflict: Research links gang membership with higher rates of violent offending and victimization, while group conflicts can extend individual disputes through retaliation and firearm violence.[99] Reviews of gang homicide similarly find that gang-related killings frequently involve firearms and occur in public settings.[100] Older law-enforcement estimates suggest that gang-related homicides accounted for about 13% of U.S. homicides annually from 2007 to 2011 and 16% in 2012, with gang-related homicide more concentrated in large cities and accounting for larger shares of killings in some jurisdictions.[101] Recent national trend evidence is limited: The last

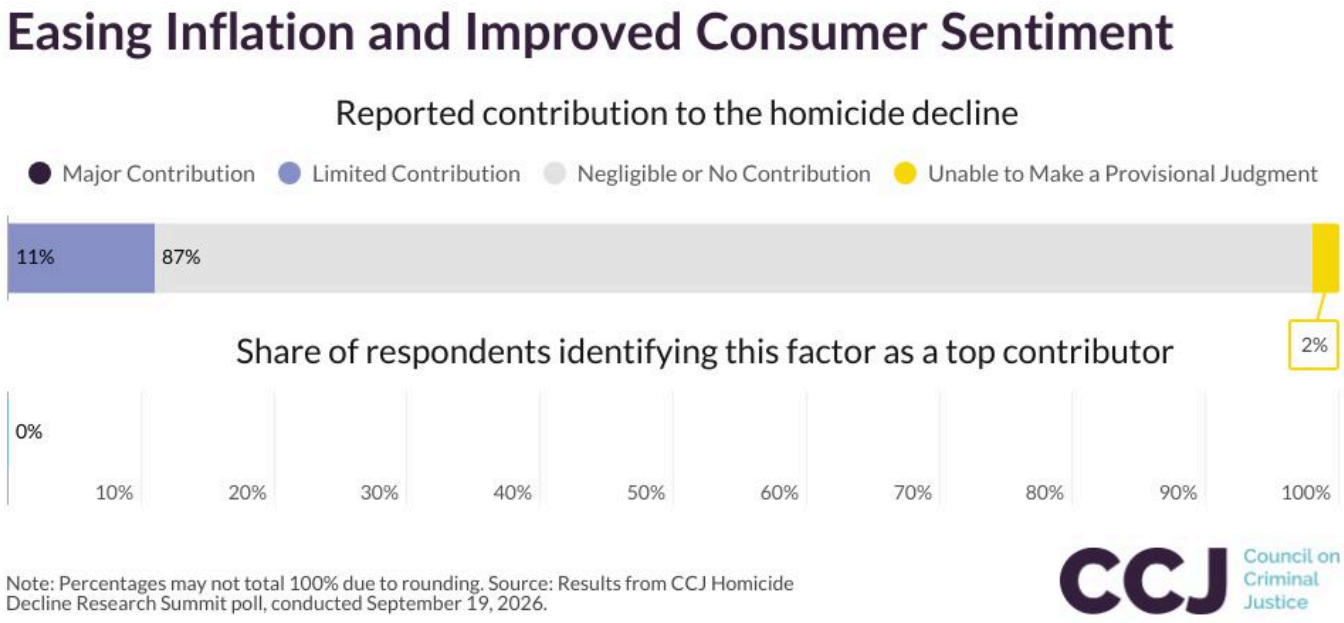
national law-enforcement estimates of gang membership and activity end in 2012, newer surveys measure lifetime rather than current gang membership, and changes in how agencies report detailed incident data complicate comparisons of more recent FBI gang-activity trends.[102]

The key questions are whether gang involvement declined, whether gang activity shifted away from violence, or whether both dynamics occurred in places experiencing the homicide decline.

Participant Comments

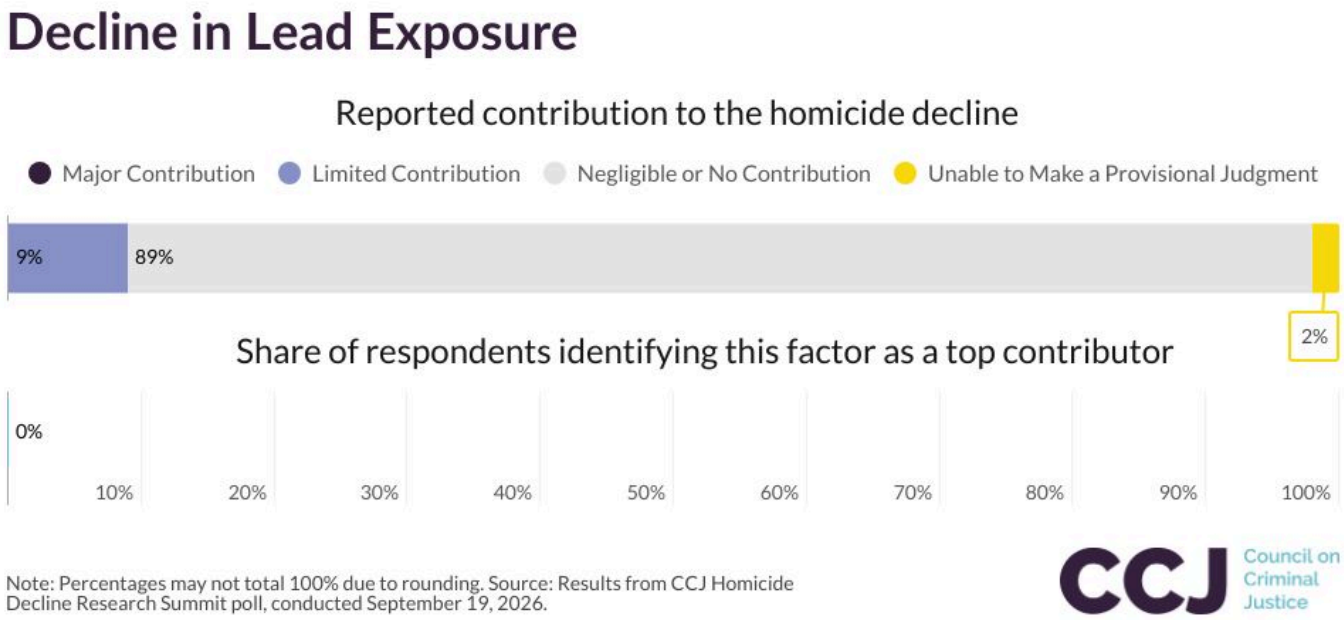
Not enough is known about changes in gang activity, in terms of participation, types of gangs, and activities, on a broad enough scale to link to the homicide decline. The termination of data on gangs at a national level has precluded the ability to link crime at a national level to gangs.
Megan Augustyn
University of Texas at Dallas

There has been no appreciable decline in the small groups and networks in which both violent victimization and offending, and a great deal of other crime, is concentrated in cities (regardless of whether such groups are considered “gangs”). Much of those groups’ routine activities, however, has moved from street settings to more private and virtual ones, and much of their criminal activity has moved from street settings such as drug markets into more discreet ones such as online credit card and identity scams. This shift is plausibly connected to fewer opportunities for friction, violence, retaliation, and beef.
David Kennedy
John Jay College of Criminal Justice



Inflation affects purchasing power, while consumer sentiment captures how people view their own finances and the broader economy. The potential homicide connection is that rising prices and worsening economic perceptions may increase financial strain and activity in informal or illicit markets where disputes can become violent. Research over several decades has linked both inflation and perceptions of economic conditions with homicide, although the relationship appears to operate partly through increases in acquisitive crime. Inflation has been associated with homicide, robbery, and burglary across U.S. and international data, and a study of 17 American cities found higher inflation associated with higher homicide rates, particularly in more disadvantaged cities.[103] Earlier U.S. research found that worsening economic perceptions were associated with acquisitive crime and, indirectly, homicide, with a stronger relationship documented for felony-related killings than argument-related killings.[104] Inflation fell from 9.1% in June 2022 to 3.0% a year later, while consumer sentiment rose from 50.0 in June 2022 to 79.0 in January 2024.[105] Those trends later shifted: Inflation reversed course and rose in 2026, and sentiment fell below its June 2022 level for several months.

The key question is whether easing inflation and improving economic perceptions reduced the financial and illicit-market pressures linked to homicide as the decline began.



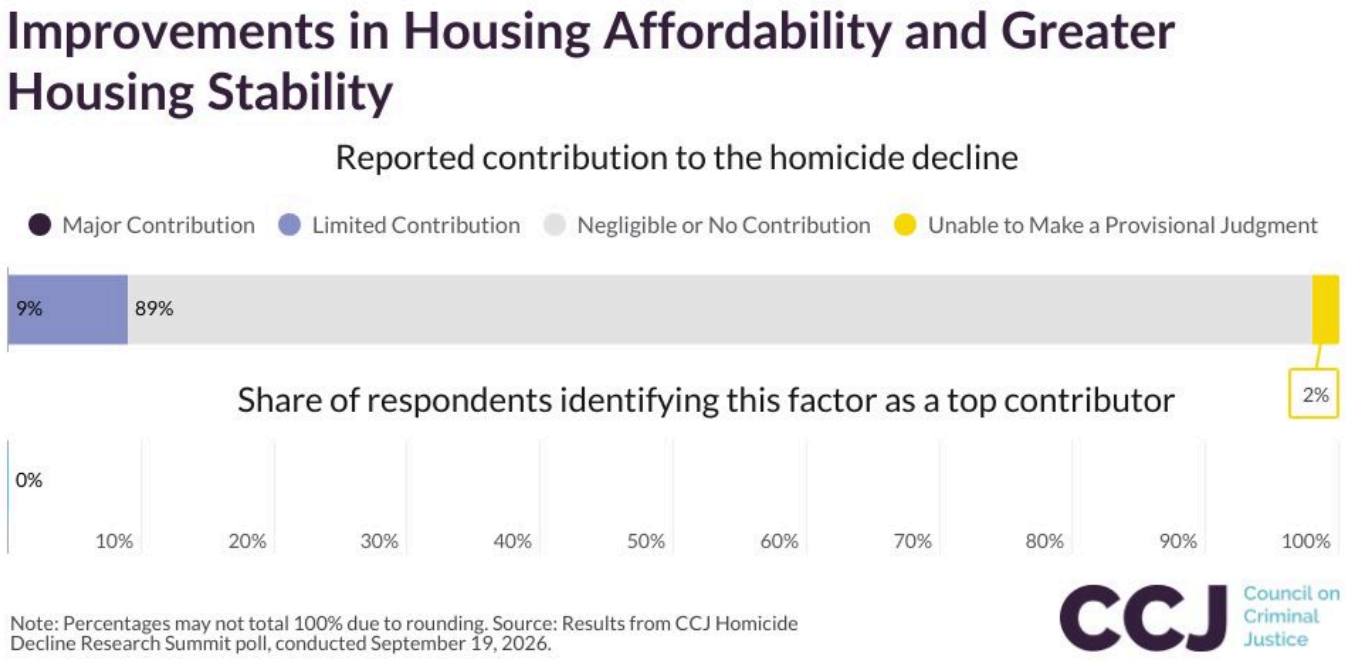
Childhood lead exposure has declined substantially in the U.S. over several decades. The potential homicide connection operates with a long lag: early lead exposure can affect brain development and is associated with later aggression, antisocial behavior, and serious violence. As generations of children with lower lead exposure reach adolescence and young adulthood—the ages when serious violence is more common—the population-level risk of homicide may decline. Research links childhood lead exposure with later delinquency and criminal behavior, including homicide and firearm violence.[106] A 2022 meta-analysis of 24 studies found a positive relationship between lead exposure and crime and estimated that declining exposure could account for 7% to 28% of the long-run U.S. homicide decline, with estimates varying across studies.[107] Blood lead levels among U.S. children under age five were 96% lower from 2017 to 2020 than in the late 1970s, although the largest reductions occurred decades ago and subsequent declines have been more gradual.[108] Because the effects of childhood exposure may emerge years later, lead exposure would not need to decline sharply after 2022 to influence homicide during the recent period.

The key question is how much decades-long reductions in childhood lead exposure continued to affect homicide from 2022 to 2026 as lower-exposure generations reached ages of higher homicide risk.

Participant Comments

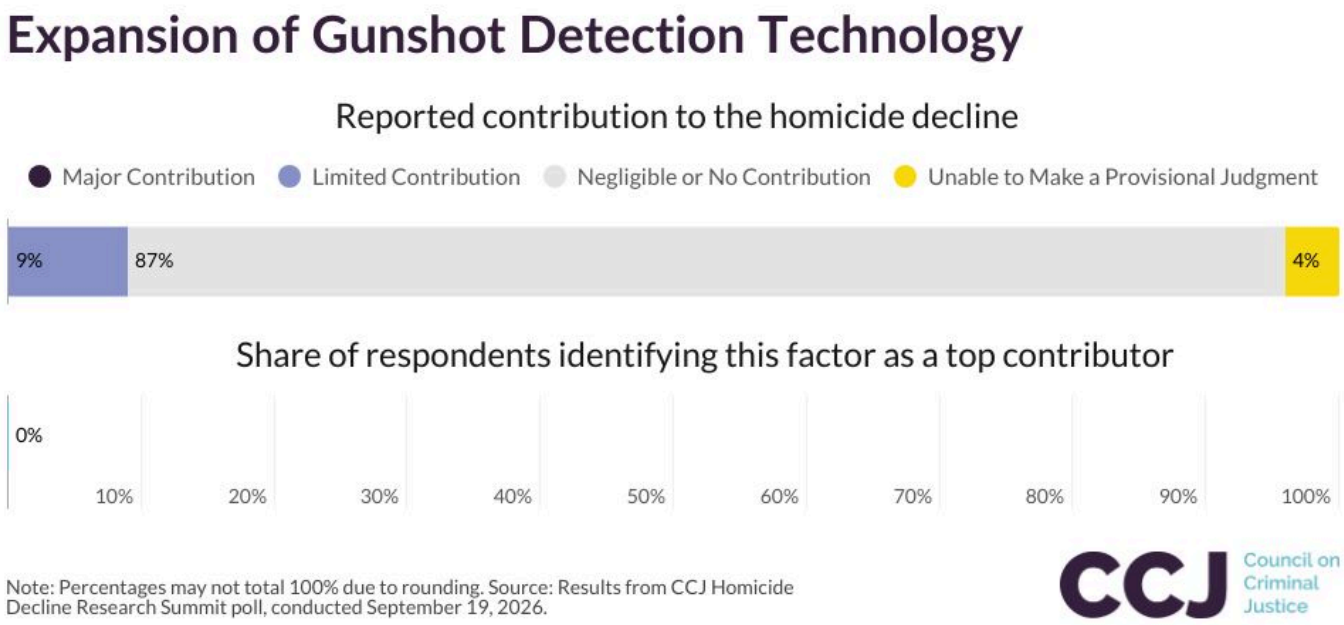
While I recognize child blood lead levels are much lower now than in the 1990s, we

also know that there is geographic variation in these levels. Given the correlation between lead and violence, if some areas had later remediation or levels that were higher than the national average that were more recently addressed, this could have some effect.
Cass Crifasi
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health



Housing affordability reflects housing costs relative to income; housing stability refers to remaining housed without repeated moves, eviction, displacement, or homelessness. The potential homicide connection is that improved affordability and greater housing stability may reduce financial hardship, displacement, and exposure to circumstances associated with violent offending and victimization. Housing loss can also lead to homelessness, where exposure to violence is high. Changes in housing costs may also change how much people work and whether they live alone, with family, or with roommates, potentially increasing or reducing time spent in settings where violence can occur; these pathways have been studied less directly. Across 126 cities, higher rent burden was associated with higher homicide rates, while eviction, vacancy, and other housing measures were not.[109] Neighborhood studies found different patterns: Eviction was associated with homicide in Philadelphia, and declining affordability was associated with gun violence across four cities.[110] Recent trends are mixed: Nearly half of renter households spent over 30% of their income on rent and utilities in 2024, eviction filings in tracked locations dipped in 2025, and homelessness remained about 28% above 2022 levels despite falling from 2024 to 2025.[111]

The key question is whether improvements in housing affordability or stability were followed by reductions in serious violence, particularly in places experiencing homicide declines.

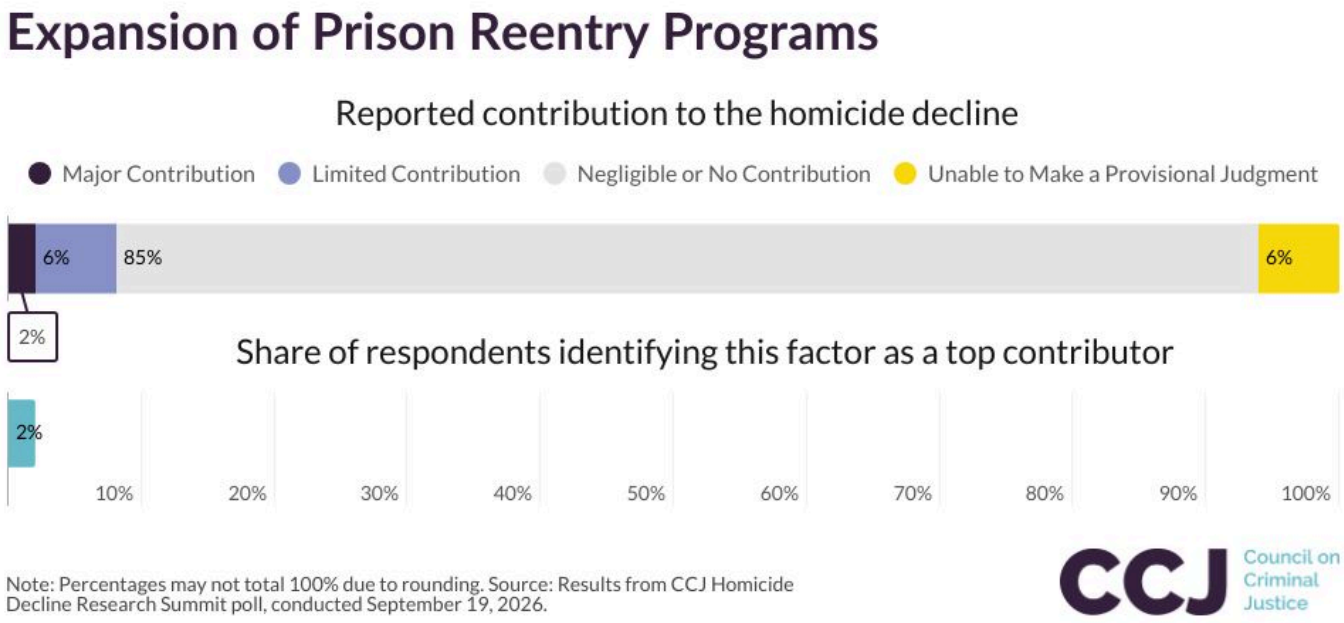


Gunshot detection technology uses acoustic sensors to identify outdoor gunfire and alert police to the approximate location of shots fired. The potential homicide connection is that gunshot alerts may support investigations and apprehension after shootings or shorten the time between a shooting and emergency care, potentially affecting both shooting incidence and lethality. Studies examining response and trauma outcomes have found shorter response or prehospital times following gunshot detection alerts, but have not found lower mortality among shooting victims.[112] Across studies of crime and investigative outcomes, findings are mixed: A 2026 meta-analysis found no overall relationship between gunshot detection and crime, while a Detroit evaluation found lower violent crime but no change in case clearance after deployment.[113] Deployment patterns were mixed during the homicide decline: ShotSpotter’s parent company, SoundThinking, reported contracts in more cities in 2025 than in 2022, while some jurisdictions, including Chicago, discontinued use.[114]

The key questions are whether changes in gunshot detection use from 2022 to 2026 improved shooting investigations, shortened the time to emergency care, or both—and whether those changes corresponded with fewer shootings or deaths.

Participant Comments

Gunshot detection technology (GDT) can reduce homicides via two mechanisms; increasing lives saved by faster emergency response, and through deterrence via improving clearances. The prior empirical work across multiple cities has not shown strong evidence that GDT increases clearances. Work on time to response generally shows 2-3 minutes faster to the scene, but this can only marginally change the number of survivors even in a large city. It is not plausible that GDT contributed to the homicide decline even in a limited capacity.
Andrew Wheeler
Crime De-Coder LLC



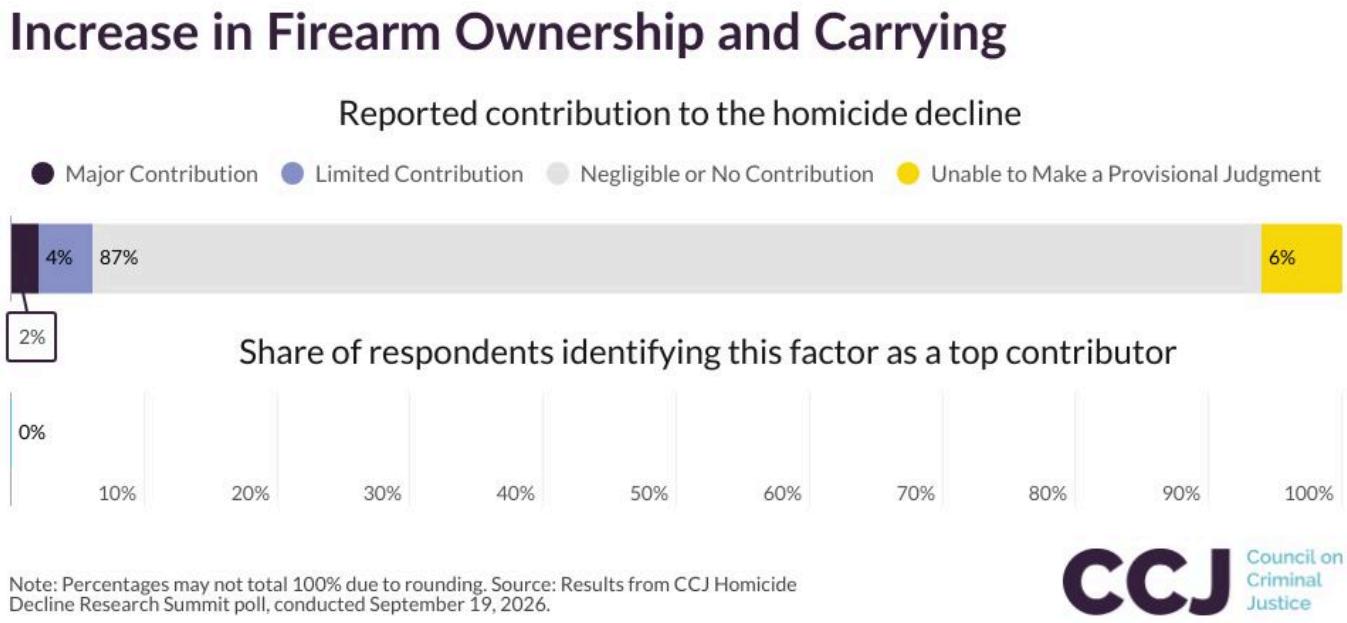
Prison reentry programs include services delivered before or after release, such as housing and employment assistance, behavioral health and substance use treatment, mentoring, and case management. The potential homicide connection depends on the services provided: Housing, employment, mentoring, and family supports may reduce instability after release, while behavioral health and substance use treatment may address problems associated with later offending. Evidence specific to homicide or violent reoffending is limited. Across evaluations, effects on general recidivism are mixed; randomized evaluations of broad service packages have often found little or no effect, while some multisite programs have been associated with fewer arrests over longer follow-up.[115] During the pandemic, many reentry programs were forced to reduce access or suspend in-person services, and some federally funded programs were still recovering into 2023; as restrictions eased, access may

have increased through both the resumption of existing services and the addition of new programming, although there is no national measure of either change.[116] Reentry effects may unfold over several years, therefore programming received before 2022 could also have influenced offending during the decline.

The key questions are whether reentry services resumed or expanded in the years before and during the homicide decline, particularly for people at elevated risk of serious violence, and whether those changes affected later offending.

Participant Comments

The expansion of reentry programs has contributed to reductions in recidivism, and CVI programs are often a provider of employment for returning citizens. The programs provide opportunities for returning citizens to serve as credible messengers in CVI programs in local communities.
Jo Richardson
University of Maryland



Firearm ownership and carrying refer to civilians owning guns and carrying them in public. The potential homicide connection may operate through competing pathways: More armed civilians could deter or interrupt violence, while greater firearm availability can make violent encounters more lethal and increase the number of guns available through theft. Firearm ownership among U.S. adults rose from 25% in 2019 to 30% in 2024.[117] Legal concealed

carrying also expanded as states changed their carry laws, although national data do not show how often people actually carried guns.[118] Prior research has linked higher firearm ownership and more permissive carry laws with higher rates of firearm homicide or other gun violence.[119] The recent homicide decline was concentrated in firearm homicide: From 2021 to 2025, firearm homicides fell 40%, compared with 20% for homicides involving other weapons; firearm homicides accounted for 86% of the overall decline.[120] Those reductions occurred while gun ownership remained above pre-pandemic levels and legal carrying continued to expand.

The key question is whether increased ownership and carrying changed firearm access, defensive use, or the lethality of violent encounters among the people, networks, and places where firearm homicide was concentrated during the period when gun homicides fell sharply.

see full research brief

Participant Comments

That firearm ownership and carrying surged just before and while homicides were declining will be seen as evidence by many people that firearms were important for deterring violence. My skepticism here is based on causal modeling research on the effects of permissive state gun laws, which suggests that more gun carrying is associated with more violence, not less. However, these effects are historical and conceivably the association is different in recent periods.
Andrew Morral
RAND

There are two mechanisms in which firearm carrying may contribute to homicide declines; via defensive gun use, and via more general deterrence. Estimates of the prevalence of defensive gun use tend to be plagued by potential survey measurement errors. Even taking them at face value, there is no evidence defensive gun use has been increasing over recent years. Firearm carrying among law-abiding citizens is not likely to contribute to reductions, as it has a countervailing effect in that more guns in circulation could contribute to more shootings and homicides.
Andrew Wheeler,
Crime De-Coder LLC



Online conflict on social media includes disputes, threats, insults, and challenges to someone’s reputation or standing that unfold in front of an online audience and may extend into offline interactions. The potential homicide connection is that these exchanges can expand the audience for disputes, provide information about potential targets, and provide information that can be used to coordinate confrontations. Research on gangs and homicide identifies escalation, targeting, and information gathering as ways social media can become part of serious violence, but homicide-specific evidence remains limited.[121] U.S. studies do not show a consistent progression from online conflict to offline violence. In Chicago, for example, shootings predicted later hostile online comments, while hostile comments did not predict later shootings; other research found that gang-affiliated posts containing threats or hostile language, or expressing anger or sadness after a death or incarceration, were associated with next-day violent crime.[122] In Prince George’s County, Maryland, 2% of 22,801 violent crimes from 2018 to 2023 had a documented social-media connection.[123] There is no national measure showing whether violence-related online conflict increased or decreased during the homicide decline.

The key question is whether online conflicts tied to serious violence became less common or less likely to become in-person violence during the decline.

Participant Comments

This is not a plausible explanation for the homicide decline because we don't have

good reason to believe that there has been a decline in online conflict on social media. However, it would be helpful to study what that trend has been over the period of interest. It would also be worth examining the use of social media mining by law enforcement to identify and intervene to prevent violence and homicides and whether those activities have increased meaningfully.
Nancy La Vigne
Rutgers School of Criminal Justice

Presidents can send public signals about crime and public safety through rhetoric, public statements, and the way they frame personnel choices and enforcement priorities, and the impact of such signals can be distinct from the direct effects of presidential choices and policies. The potential homicide connection is that these signals could change how likely people believe they are to be caught or punished, potentially deterring violence; they may also influence the behavior of police and prosecutors or affect public trust and cooperation with law enforcement. Research suggests that national political signals can affect behavior, including some forms of violent hate crime, but there is little direct evidence connecting presidential messaging or leadership to homicide trends generally.[124] Long-run national research also finds little evidence that violent crime rates systematically differ by presidential party.[125] The national homicide decline began under President Joe Biden and continued after President Donald Trump returned to office in 2025, so any presidential-signaling effect would need to be tied to specific shifts in messaging or expectations, rather than to political party or officeholding alone.

The key question is whether shifts in presidential public-safety signaling from 2022 to 2026 changed expectations or behavior related to serious violence in ways that may have shaped the homicide decline.

Participant Comments

This ought not be discounted. Between the president’s executive orders on policing, calls for more investment in hiring and retention, and administrative policy shifts with respect to both pattern and practice investigations and consent decrees, the impact could be significant enough to register. Note the paper by Devi & Fryer (2020), which found 34,000 excess felonies and 900+ excess homicides across five cities over a two-year period, resulting from police pullbacks caused by the launching of pattern and practice investigations following viral use-of-force incidents. If these signals had the opposite effect, a small impact is plausible.

Rafael Mangual
Manhattan Institute

The shift from cash to digital payments may affect crime by reducing the amount of money available to steal in face-to-face encounters. The potential homicide connection is indirect: Carrying and exchanging less cash may reduce robberies, thefts, or cash-based illicit-market transactions that can create opportunities for confrontations to become violent. Evidence for this pathway is limited but consistent with the basic premise. When electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards replaced checks and cash for public benefits, overall crime fell by 9.2%, with declines of over 10% in burglary, assault, and larceny; the estimated effect on robbery was also negative but was not statistically significant.[126] Cash use has continued to fall as a share of consumer payments, from 18% in 2022 to 14% in 2024, although the average number of monthly cash payments has remained unchanged since 2020, and cash carried by consumers remains above pre-pandemic levels.[127]

The key question is whether reduced cash use from 2022 to 2026 changed the frequency of robbery or other cash-related encounters in ways that contributed to the homicide decline.

Participant Comments

I rated this as "no contribution" because the decline in cash use had been underway long before the pandemic increase; and if changes in cash carrying/use had rapidly accelerated after the pandemic, we should also have seen an acceleration in the declines in robbery post-pandemic and we did not. There is some evidence that the decline in cash over the long-term has had some effect on the decline in robbery, but that has not been linked to changes in homicide long-term.
Janet Lauritsen
University of Missouri – St. Louis

Immigration enforcement includes efforts at the borders and within the U.S. to identify, arrest, detain, and deport noncitizens who may be subject to removal. The potential homicide connection is that enforcement could prevent entry by people who might commit serious violence, deter offending, or detain or deport people who might otherwise commit serious violence. Prior evaluations have generally found little effect on serious violence. Two studies of Secure Communities, a nationwide program linking local arrests with federal immigration enforcement, found no observable effect on violent crime or homicide; a study of 287(g)

agreements in North Carolina likewise found no reduction in murder or other violent crime.[128] Federal immigration enforcement expanded sharply beginning in January 2025; over the following year, ICE arrests quadrupled and average daily detention numbers nearly doubled.[129] That expansion began well after homicide began falling in 2022. The increase in arrests was concentrated among people with no prior convictions or nonviolent convictions, while arrests of people with prior violent convictions changed much less.[130]

The key questions are whether serious violence changed after the 2025 enforcement surge among the people and places most affected by it, and whether any such change can be separated from the homicide decline that was already underway.

see full research brief

Participant Comments

Immigrant communities are notably low crime, at levels below the general population. Increased immigration enforcement disrupts such communities. It breaks up families; leads adults to withdraw from work and community activities; leads young people to withdraw from school and community activities; leads entire communities to withdraw from government and police; and increases opportunities for unaddressed violent and other victimization, much of which will go unreported.
David Kennedy
John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Homeless encampments were becoming more common before COVID-19 and became more visible in cities during the pandemic. As cities emerged from the pandemic, removals became more frequent; in 2024, the Supreme Court held that enforcing public-camping laws does not violate the Eighth Amendment.[131] The potential homicide connection is whether encampments concentrate serious violence in particular places; removing them could reduce those concentrations, leave them unchanged, or shift violence elsewhere. A 2024 review links homelessness with both offending and victimization, emphasizing the adversity and exposure that accompany homelessness rather than homelessness itself.[132] A study using data from Boulder, Colorado, found that crime concentrated near encampments but could not establish causation or who was involved, while a Canadian study found that most encampments were not followed by increases in violent crime in the surrounding area; where violent crime changed significantly, decreases were more common than increases.[133] Studies of encampment removal found no consistent reduction in violence: A Bronx encampment closure produced no short-term change in nearby crime, while Denver removals produced

localized declines in disorder and auto theft but not in violent crimes.[134]

The key question is whether increased encampment removals reduced serious violence or shifted where it occurred during the homicide decline.

Arrests fell sharply during the pandemic and remained below pre-pandemic levels in 2024, reducing the number of people exposed to formal criminal justice contact. The potential homicide connection may operate through competing pathways: Fewer arrests may reduce deterrence or incapacitation, while less arrest exposure for lower-level offending may reduce disruptions—to school, work, family, and peer relationships—that are associated with later offending. Evidence for the latter pathway is strongest among youth: A meta-analysis of controlled trials found that formal juvenile system processing did not reduce later delinquency and may increase it, while longitudinal research links police stops and arrests with higher subsequent delinquency.[135] At the same time, research on 53 large U.S. cities from 2010 to 2015 found no evidence that declining arrest rates caused the 2015 increase in homicide.[136] Recent trends are mixed: Total arrests in 2024 remained 25% below 2019 levels, but juvenile arrest rates have risen since 2020.[137]

The key questions are which arrests declined, among whom, and whether those changes reduced later serious violence or instead reduced enforcement against people at elevated risk of committing it.

Participant Comments

During the 2022-26 timeframe arrests for fatal and nonfatal shootings remained stable and even slightly increased for nonfatal shootings. A decline in arrests therefore is not a relevant explanatory factor for a decline in homicide.
Susan Parker
Northwestern University

Beginning in summer 2025, the Trump administration deployed or sought to deploy National Guard personnel in several major U.S. cities, with missions spanning public safety, immigration enforcement, and protest response. The potential homicide connection is that deployments could reduce violence in targeted cities by increasing enforcement, deterring violence, adding capacity, or freeing local police to focus on serious violence. The prospect of deployment elsewhere could also extend deterrence beyond those cities. Deployments varied

in size, duration, purpose, and location, and information on where personnel were stationed and what they did is incomplete. In Washington, D.C., 2,000 guard personnel were deployed, largely in commercial, transit, and tourist areas; a study found reductions in opportunistic property crime but not violent crime.[138] A multi-city analysis found no statistically significant reduction in weekly homicide rates after deployments in Los Angeles, Memphis, and Washington, D.C.[139] Memphis saw an initial but unsustained decline in violent crime.

The key question is whether deployments affected serious violence, either in cities where they occurred or elsewhere through the prospect of deployment, and if so, whether those effects changed the pace of the national homicide decline after 2025.

see full research brief

Participant Comments

I rated National Guard Deployment as having "no contribution" because there is good scientific evidence that has assessed this issue and demonstrated that it has not had an effect on homicide. Homicide declined similarly in places where the Guard was not deployed suggesting that a shared sets of explanatory factors was operating to effect the changes under both of these conditions.
Janet Lauritsen
University of Missouri – St. Louis

Electronic monitoring uses GPS, radio-frequency devices, smartphone applications, and related technologies to track people in community settings, often during pretrial release, probation, parole, or home confinement. The potential connection to homicide depends in part on what electronic monitoring is used to do and what it replaces: Monitoring may deter prohibited movement or contact, help authorities respond to violations, and provide location information for investigations. But when it replaces incarceration, people who otherwise would have been confined remain in the community. Evidence on serious reoffending is mixed and rarely examines homicide specifically. Across U.S. evaluations, electronic monitoring has not consistently reduced serious new charges or rearrest for violent crimes; one California program found lower violent rearrest among people on parole receiving GPS monitoring and intensive supervision, but the effects of monitoring could not be separated from the additional supervision.[140] The estimated number of people electronically monitored through the criminal justice system rose from about 53,000 in 2005 to 150,700 in 2021; the 2021 number is equivalent to about 4% of the probation and parole population that year, although the estimate also included people in pretrial and other statuses.[141]

The key questions are whether electronic monitoring expanded or was used differently from 2022 to 2026, and whether those changes affected serious violence through greater detection and intervention, substitution for incarceration, or both.

Glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists, commonly known as GLP-1s, are medications used to treat Type 2 diabetes and, for some medications, obesity or weight management. The potential homicide connection is indirect: If GLP-1s reduce impulsivity, craving, heavy substance use, or related behaviors, they may reduce the likelihood that conflicts or crises become violent. Evidence linking GLP-1s to violence is limited and not homicide-specific. A 2022 animal study found that activating GLP-1 receptors reduced the development of aggression-like behavior in male mice.[142] A national survey of U.S. adults who had used GLP-1 medications found that current users showed weaker associations between impulsivity and self-reported violent behavior, and between alcohol use and self-reported violent behavior, than former users.[143] The impulsivity finding was more consistent than the alcohol finding, and the analytic sample was 63% female and concentrated among adults ages 35 and older, making its relevance to populations at elevated risk of serious violence less clear.

The key question is whether GLP-1 use became common enough among populations at elevated risk of serious violence, early enough in the decline, for those behavioral effects to register in homicide trends.

Participant Comments

Despite the theoretical linkage, there is a clear mismatch in population between those utilizing medications and the population affected by homicide declines.
Patrick Carter
University of Michigan

This is a provocative, creative idea but I am almost certain it is wrong. For homicide rates to collapse as they have, there has to be a dramatic change in the lives and behavior of Black men, especially young ones, and that is not who is taking GLP-1 agonists.
Keith Humphreys
Stanford University

Neighborhood crime message boards and alerts are place-based online platforms where residents exchange information about crime, suspicious activity, and safety concerns. The

potential homicide connection is that local alerts may change where people go, how watchful they are, and whether they share information, video, or witness accounts with neighbors or police, potentially changing opportunities for violent offending and victimization or providing information after serious incidents. U.S. research suggests these platforms can change how residents perceive and respond to crime, but has not established effects on crime itself. A Denver study of Nextdoor posts found residents warning neighbors, seeking information or security footage, and discussing surveillance and other precautions, while national studies found neighborhood-app use associated with higher perceptions of local crime and greater crime concern.[144] Nextdoor reached one-third of U.S. households in 2025, but available data do not show whether crime-related use increased during the homicide decline.[145]

The key question is whether use of these platforms changed residents’ routines, vigilance, reporting, or evidence-sharing in ways associated with serious violence or its investigation during the homicide decline.

Participant Comments

This technology is too reactive and unlikely to have a significant deterrent effect.
Cass Crifasi
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

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. Respondents were invited to provide open-ended responses detailing one or more research priorities.

Table 1 summarizes the areas they identified.[146] Community violence intervention and descriptive and comparative analyses were the two most frequently mentioned areas, with 13 mentions each, followed by gun policy and carrying and the examination of long-term trends, each of which received 10 mentions. Drugs, incapacitation, retaliatory violence, and the future of violence prevention each received one mention.

Across the comments, participants frequently called for research that examines how multiple social and policy factors may operate at the same time or interact, rather than exploring a single explanation for the homicide decline. They also emphasized the importance of

studying the trends that preceded the decline, particularly the rise in homicide from 2015 to 2021.

Table 1: Areas for Further Homicide Research

Community Violence Intervention and Related Programs

Approaches involving community collaboration, including CVI, focused deterrence, hospital-based violence intervention, and related approaches, were among the most frequently mentioned research priorities.

Respondents noted rapid changes to these programs at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and in subsequent years, but emphasized that the evidence base has not kept pace with their adoption. Multiple participants proposed a national inventory documenting where programs operate, their characteristics and funding, and measures of implementation, dosage, and fidelity.

They also recommended using variation in when and where programs were deployed to conduct quasi-experimental evaluations. Studies could compare jurisdictions that received earlier or more intensive interventions with otherwise similar jurisdictions that received less intervention, while accounting for pretreatment trends, regression to the mean, and displacement. In addition, participants called for mixed-methods and qualitative research, including studies of how police and non-law enforcement providers work together as part of a broader violence-reduction strategy.

Comparative Research Across Places and Time

One of the most frequently mentioned priorities was a more detailed description of how homicide changed from 2022 to 2026, including how different places and populations returned toward the long-term trend that emerged in the 1990s before being interrupted in 2015. Researchers said emphasis should be placed on determining whether the same cities, neighborhoods, demographic and age groups, and types of homicide that drove the increase also drove the decline.

Participants recommended comparisons across multiple levels of analysis, including

countries, states, cities, and neighborhoods. Cross-national comparisons could help identify broad social patterns, while more local analyses could examine factors specific to particular places. Several summit scholars proposed case studies to compare cities that experienced large homicide declines with those that did not and examine differences between them.

Gun Policy and Gun Carrying

Firearms emerged as one of the most frequently mentioned areas in need of further research. Participants noted that the recent decline was concentrated heavily in firearm homicides, and that researchers lack good measures of firearm access and carrying, particularly among people at greatest risk of homicide involvement. Several respondents requested better individual- and local-level measures of legal and illegal carrying.

Specific data needs included detailed crime-gun trace data, information about the original purchaser and possessor of guns involved in crimes, time-to-crime measures, firearm trafficking networks, and ghost guns. Respondents also proposed examining whether certain firearms affected by specific laws appear less frequently in homicide incidents and whether firearm restrictions changed gun availability among high-risk individuals. They also suggested state-level analyses comparing changes in homicide across states with varying degrees of gun restrictions.

Long-Term Homicide Trends

Throughout the summit, participants raised a broader question: Is the recent historic low in homicide a continuation of the decline that began in the 1990s, or does it represent a new trend? Examining the recent decline in a longer historical context could help researchers identify social changes that develop over years, or decades.

Respondents recommended city-level analyses extending back to at least the early 1990s. Such studies could uncover whether the increase in homicide that occurred in 2020 and 2021 was a temporary departure from a longer-term decline and whether the post-2022 decline represents a return to that trajectory or a new structural change.

Long-term analyses could also incorporate international comparisons and key macro-level correlates of crime. Participants suggested examining lagged effects of broader social changes or policy interventions and the possibility of a “tipping point,” in which homicide falls

below a certain threshold and subsequent declines become self-reinforcing.

Differences Across Populations and Types of Homicide

Participants cautioned against treating homicide as a single phenomenon. Future studies could distinguish among community violence, intimate partner homicide, homicides involving women and children, gang-related violence, and other circumstances. If different types of homicide followed different trajectories, the factors contributing to those changes might differ as well.

There was also substantial interest in the “tail” of the homicide distribution: the relatively small population of people at greatest risk of homicide involvement. Researchers could examine whether the decline occurred because this high-risk population became smaller, because people within the high-risk group became less likely to commit homicide or be victimized, or both. This work may require linking mortality, criminal justice, demographic, and individual-level data.

Several respondents called for research on racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic differences in the decline, including whether trends differed across Black, Hispanic, and White communities and whether and how socioeconomic conditions shaped those patterns. Ethnographic research could provide information on changes in attitudes, behavior, police interactions, informal social control, and violence within communities that administrative data cannot capture.

Government Capacity

Summit attendees called for more research on the ability of federal, state, and local governments to address homicide through policing, CVI, and other public safety and social programs. Rather than treating government capacity as a single strategy, respondents suggested examining how combinations or “bundles” of government programs and investments may affect violence. Several also called for closer study of the role American Rescue Plan Act funding may have played in reducing homicide.

Policing

Policing was mentioned less often than CVI as a research priority. Participants called for further study of targeted policing strategies during the decline period and changes in police staffing levels, and for clearer definitions of “proactive” policing strategies. Improvements in homicide clearance rates and the expansion and effectiveness of police technologies were also identified as areas for further research.

Other Areas for Exploration

Summit participants raised several additional topics throughout the meeting and in their poll responses:

- **Whether Homicide has Reached a “New Normal”:** Some participants raised the possibility that the events of 2020, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, produced broader social changes that are not yet well understood. Suggested areas for study included changes in alcohol use, time spent at home rather than in public places, and youth mental health issues that may be crime-inhibiting, such as depression.
- **Excess Mortality and Violence:** Respondents called for better and more complete data on excess deaths and a clearer profile of people at greatest risk of violence from 2020 to 2022.
- **Facial Recognition:** Participants identified a need for better data on the timing and use of facial recognition technology and for comparisons between agencies that use it and those that do not.
- **Drugs:** Suggested areas of analysis included the potential impact of individual drug use patterns, including a possible substitution of cannabis for alcohol, and changes in street drug markets.
- **Incapacitation:** Participants called for network analyses examining how incarceration may have changed risks of committing violence or being victimized.
- **Retaliatory Violence:** Respondents suggested research estimating how much of the homicide rise and decline may be related to changes in retaliatory violence.

Conclusion

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. 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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[146] These areas were coded from responses to open-ended questions about research priorities at the end of the poll. For this analysis, they are treated as distinct research areas, although a comprehensive research strategy could incorporate multiple areas and methods. Forty-seven participants completed the poll; because respondents could identify more than one priority, the responses yielded 86 total research suggestions.