



Is Violent Crime **ACTUALLY** Coming Down in 2025?

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In recent weeks, a flurry of news stories have been published touting record declines in homicides in several of America's largest cities. These news stories have claimed that in the first half of 2025, the number of homicides in Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, St. Louis, and other major cities were significantly lower than for the same period (January through June) in 2024. Many of these news reports have asserted that these homicide reductions were historic and quickly sought to link these reductions to the policies of the incumbent mayors of these cities.

Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott, for example, announced that Baltimore has experienced a 22% decline in homicides, and a 19% decline in non-fatal shootings, for the first six months of 2025 as compared to the first six months of 2024. Mayor Scott attributed these declines to his public safety plan that "tackled violence as a public health problem," and "emphasized community engagement." The Baltimore mayor's office claimed that the city is at its lowest homicide rate in 50 years.¹

Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson's office said that Chicago's homicides in the first half of 2025 represented a 32% drop from the first half of 2024 and was the lowest number since 2014. In addition to taking credit for these homicide declines, Mayor Johnson's office also said there were 39% fewer shootings this year to date, compared to the first half of last year. Johnson asserted that,

while there was more work to be done, “this is certainly an encouraging indication that our efforts...are paying dividends.”²

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass claimed a 20% drop in homicides in Los Angeles in the first half of the year as compared to 2024, and said that the city is on pace for its lowest homicide total in nearly 60 years. Mayor Bass attributed the declines to her “comprehensive safety strategies with community organizations, while holding people accountable.”³

The city of St. Louis also reported that from January 2025 to the end of June 2025, there were fewer homicides within the city than in every year since 2014.⁴

What are we to make of these reports? Is violent crime really declining significantly in major cities across the United States? If so, what might be causing these declines? Is it the crime policies of various mayors, as has been claimed by politicians and commentators? Since each administration pursued different policies, yet all experienced similar results, these declines are not likely the result of public policies alone. This article will examine the data on reported homicides in 4 of these cities over the last twelve years to determine the long-term trend. It will then examine what might be plausible causes for any homicide reductions that are revealed.

The increase in violent crime in cities across the United States in recent years past has been well-documented.⁵ So, if violent crime is now falling in cities across the country, as is being widely reported, it is important for law enforcement leaders and policy makers to work to understand why.

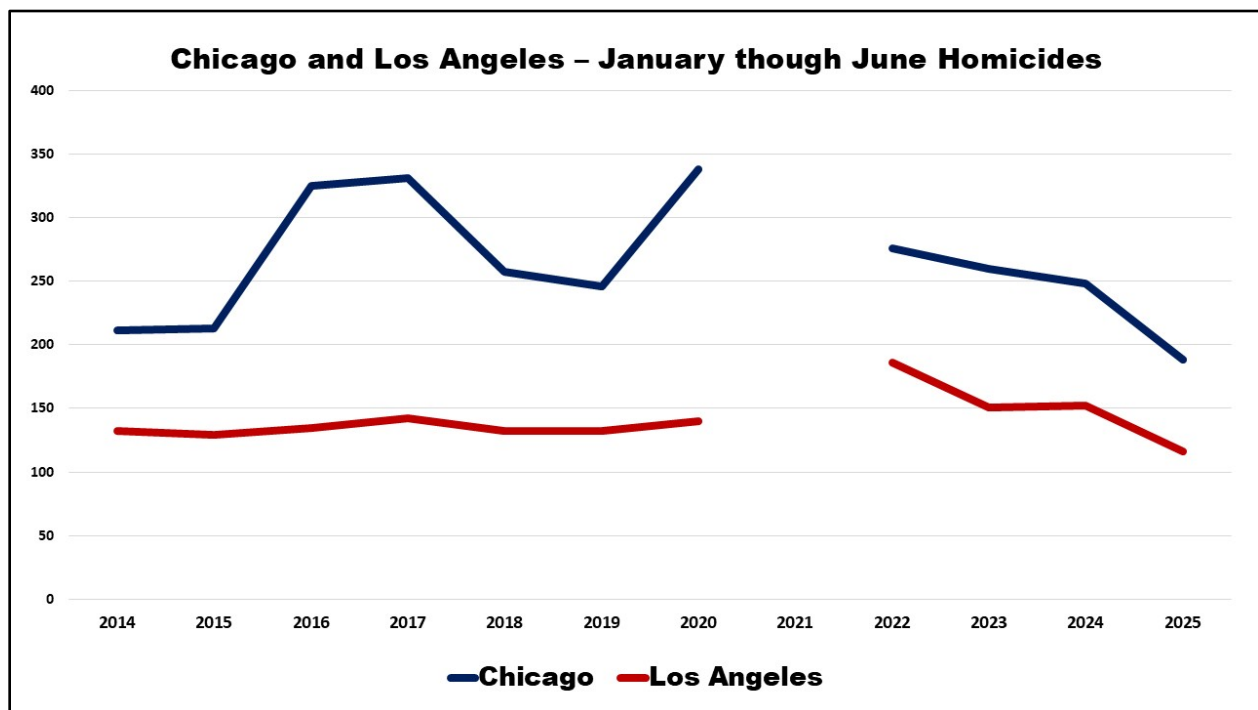
The Statistical Reality

We looked to the official Uniform Crime Reports homicide statistics for Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, and St. Louis for the first six months of each year, going back to 2014. Interestingly, all of these cities except St. Louis failed to turn in data to the FBI for the year 2021. Also, the official Uniform Crime Report data publicly available from the FBI only covers crimes committed through 2023. Therefore, we had to rely on the accuracy of news articles for homicide statistics for 2024 and 2025.

Furthermore, we cannot emphasize enough how unusual it is to rely on comparisons of only the first six months of each year. It is extremely premature to declare a crime trend based on only half a year's worth of data, especially when dealing with homicides, as homicides are (fortunately) one of the least frequently occurring categories of crimes. This is why it is so important to examine multiple whole years of homicide data. But, in light of the proclamations of elected officials and commentators on this apparent trend in recent weeks, we examined the available data as best we could.

Figure 1 below is a graph of the first half of the year homicide numbers for Chicago (population 2.66 million) and Los Angeles (population 3.82 million) from 2014 through 2025. As the graph reveals, the failure of these cities to provide crime data to the FBI for 2021 leaves an obvious gap in the pattern of homicide occurrences.

Figure 1. First Half of the Year Homicides for Chicago and Los Angeles, 2014 – 2025.



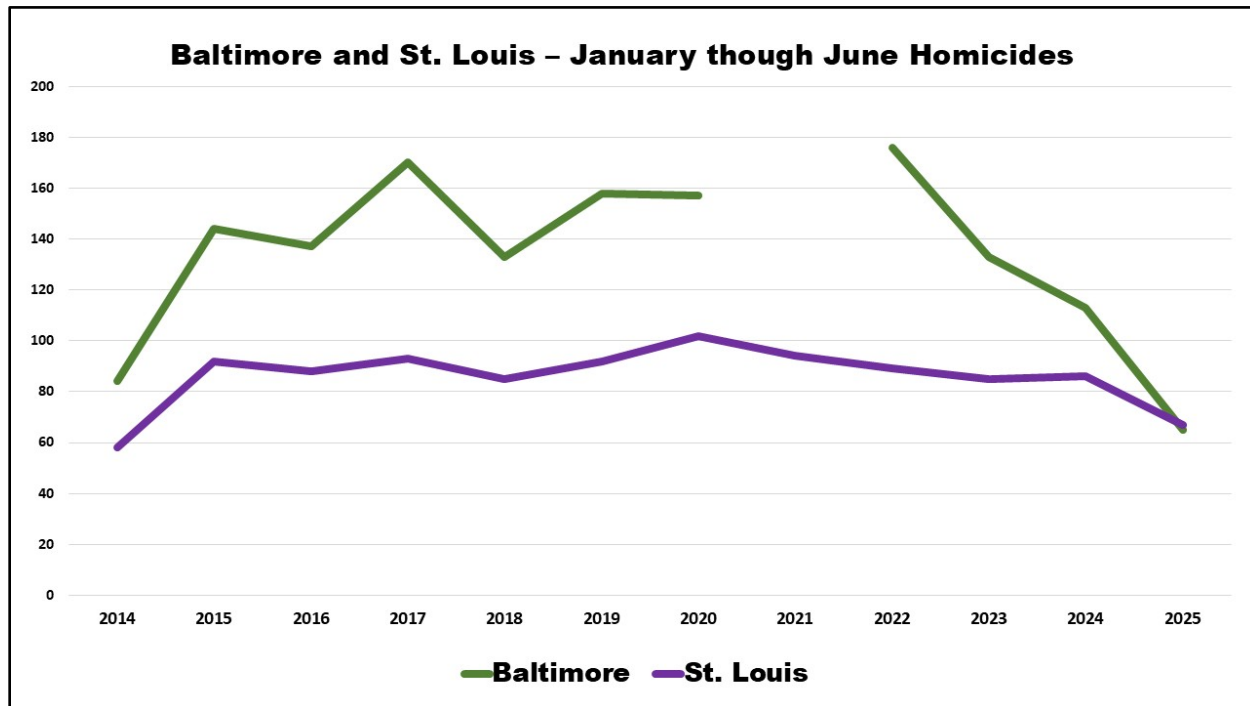
Nevertheless, we can see that far more homicides occur in Chicago than Los Angeles, despite Chicago having almost a third fewer people. Homicides during the first six months of each year in Chicago fluctuated inconsistently from year to year, making it particularly risky to assume the

accuracy of predictions about what each successive year will bring. However, there has been a decline in homicides during the first half of the year for the years 2022 through 2025. The homicides for the first half of 2025 are 32% lower than in 2022.

As for Los Angeles, the homicide numbers appear to be stable from year to year until the gap in the data in 2021. When the data resumes in 2022, however, homicides had spiked upward by 33% from 2020. While Los Angeles shows a declining pattern from 2022 through 2025, just like Chicago, the long-term pattern suggests the homicide numbers are simply returning to the pre-2021 numbers. This graph reveals that the longer-term patterns can vary from city to city as each city faces different circumstances.

Figure 2 below is a graph of the first half of the year homicide numbers for Baltimore (population 565,239) and St. Louis (population 281,754) from 2014 through 2025. While Baltimore failed to provide crime data for 2021, St. Louis did provide data.

Figure 2. First Half of the Year Homicides for Baltimore and St. Louis, 2014 – 2025.



Like Chicago, the number of homicides during the first six months of each year in Baltimore fluctuated dramatically from year to year up to the 2021 gap in the data. When the data resumed in 2022, the homicide numbers were very elevated, but appear to have been in decline ever since. The homicides for the first half of 2025 in Baltimore are 63% lower than in 2022. As for St. Louis, the long-term trend reveals a spike in homicides beginning in 2015 that remained high until after 2020, and then began a year-over-year decline through 2025.

Therefore, the answer to our first question is *yes*, the number of homicides reported for the first half of the year in these four cities *appears* to reveal a recent decline in the number of homicides when compared to recent years. However, the steepness of this decline, and the pathway to this decline, varies significantly from city to city. Next, we consider what factors may have influenced these declines. Many elected officials and commentators have credited these cities' mayors and their public safety initiatives for these declines, but do the facts support these claims?

Baltimore's Mayor Scott took office in December 2020, but Baltimore did not provide any data to evaluate his first twelve months in office. However, during the first six months of his second year in office, there were 12% more homicides than the year before he took office. Chicago's Mayor Johnson did not take office until May of 2023, after Chicago had already experienced two years of declining homicides. Los Angeles Mayor Bass assumed office in December 2022, which does correspond with a period of homicide declines in Los Angeles. But correlation does not necessarily indicate causation, and these individual mayors' policies cannot explain the simultaneous homicide declines in many other large cities across the nation. What other factors might be at work to decrease the number of homicides in many U.S. cities?

Things Returning Back to Pre-Pandemic Normal?

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, many cities, counties, and states chose to release thousands of criminal offenders from prisons and jails. According to one report, more than 100,000 convicted felons were released early from state and federal prisons between March and June of 2020.⁶ At the same time, many federal, county, and municipal courts drastically curtailed their operations, while jails severely restricted the use of pretrial detention.⁷ As a result of these

decisions, hundreds of thousands of felony offenders, including many violent offenders, were released back into communities with little risk of being locked up again for re-offending during 2020 and 2021.

Predictably, national crime rates spiked during 2020 and 2021 in most communities, but because of unknown reasons, Baltimore, Chicago, and Los Angeles failed to collect data on crimes during this crime spike period. FBI crime statistics for the law enforcement agencies that did report data for 2020, 2021, and 2022 reveal that violent crime at the national level increased by 44% from 2020 to 2022.⁸ **In light of the fact that many of the massive numbers of previously-incarcerated individuals committed new crimes and were re-incarcerated after 2022, it is possible that the declines we are seeing now are simply the result of homicide rates returning to pre-pandemic levels.**

Violent Offenders Being Removed from the Community Between 2020 and 2022?

What might have happened to those hundreds of thousands of offenders released from prisons and jails who returned to reoffend in their communities? Most of the homicide victims of the 2020-2022 homicide spike bore a striking resemblance to the known offenders in these homicides, and shared similarities with the U.S. prison population.

According to the FBI National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) data, the victims of the 2020-2022 homicides were 78% male, while 87% of the known homicide offenders for those years, and 93% of state prison inmates were male. Approximately 68% of the homicide victims were under age 40, while 79% of homicide offenders, and 69% of state prison inmates were under the age of 40. Of the 2020-2022 homicides, approximately 66% involved an interpersonal dispute between friends, acquaintances, or strangers, not a robbery or domestic violence situation.⁹

These statistics suggest that during the three-year homicide spike of 2020-2022, the individuals in the population that tended to engage in violent crime encountered one another back in their communities and engaged in lethal violence against one another. It is possible that the decline in homicides today is partly due to many of these offenders killing each other

during 2020-2022, with many of the survivors of these violent encounters also being taken out of communities through incarceration.

Additionally, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported approximately 307,000 deaths by accidental overdoses on illegal drugs in the U.S. during 2020-2022. In 2019, the CDC only recorded 70,630 accidental overdoses on illegal drugs, 31% lower than the yearly average during 2020-2022. The majority of the drugs involved in these 2020-2022 deaths were opioids such as fentanyl and heroin, and stimulants such as methamphetamine and cocaine.¹⁰

The National Institute of Health (NIH) reported 313,314 deaths due to alcohol consumption and alcohol-related accidents during 2020-2022, an average of 104,438 alcohol-related deaths per year. In 2019, however, there were only 78,927 alcohol-related deaths, 24% fewer deaths than the annual average for 2020-2022.¹¹ The majority of those who died in accidental illegal drug overdoses, or due to alcohol consumption and alcohol-related accidents, were predominantly low-income, non-white men under the age of 40 years old, just like the homicide victims and perpetrators. Criminologists have well documented that career criminal offenders tend to live “life as a party,” frequently engaging in a party lifestyle when not working, committing crimes, or incarcerated.¹²

Therefore, it appears that thousands of young male offenders from the small segment of the population that most contributes to violent crime were removed from society through death or by incarceration as a result of living lives of crime and engaging in other high-risk activities.

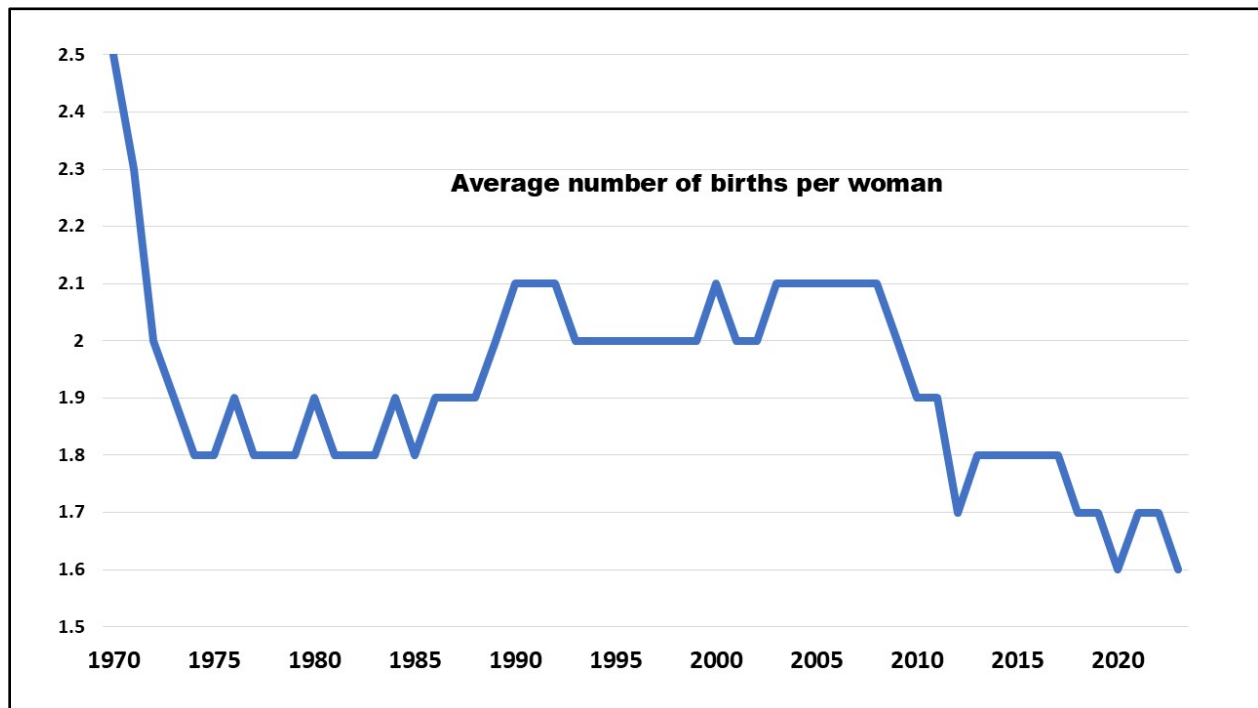
Demographic Shifts in the United States

Some might note, however, that young men have always been removing themselves from the population in high numbers through the inevitable outcomes of crime, high-risk drug use, and other risky behaviors. Aren't these offenders just replaced by the next wave of risk-taking young men taking their place? Maybe in the past, but not any longer. Figure 3 below shows the U.S. fertility rate since 1970 which has been plummeting for years and is resulting in a much smaller number of young men in the U.S. population. The U.S. fertility rate (the average number of children born to a woman) has been declining in our nation since the early 1970s, due to access to birth control

and the nationwide legalization of abortion. The U.S. birth rate then plummeted further since the recession of 2008.¹³

When a nation's fertility rate falls below 2.0 (two births is called the "replacement value," when two children "replace" their two parents in the population), the nation's population usually shrinks. **The number of children born in the U.S. has declined dramatically over the last two decades. The American children that were *not* born in 2008 would have been 17 years old today if they *had* been born. As fewer youth are being born in the U.S. each year, that means there are inevitably fewer and fewer persons alive who are statistically most likely to become potential homicide offenders or homicide victims.**

Figure 3. U.S. Fertility Rate, 1970-2023



Additionally, we should consider migration patterns within the United States. In the wake of the pandemic, many large cities in the U.S. saw massive numbers of people leaving these cities. One survey found that those who moved out of major U.S. cities in 2020-2022 sought places with lower costs of living, more open spaces, lower crime, and more flexible lockdown rules.¹⁴ Baltimore,

Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York were some of the cities that experienced waves of fleeing residents.

Another study found that most of those relocating from these cities to more suburban or rural locations were under age 40—the age bracket at greatest risk of becoming a homicide victim or perpetrator.¹⁵ In Los Angeles, the uncontrolled wildfires of February 2025 alone were estimated to have displaced between 150,000 and 200,000 persons from that city.¹⁶ These homicide declines might be largely explained by fewer people within the city capable of becoming homicide victims or offenders due to fewer people being born and mass migration out of these cities.

Therefore, it is extremely important that we focus on crime **rates** – the number of homicides per capita – rather than raw numbers of homicides. For example, 20 homicides in a city of 200,000 persons is a high rate of homicides, while 20 homicides in a city of 2 million persons is a very low rate of homicides. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Baltimore was estimated to have had a population of 594,601 persons in 2019, and 565,239 in 2023.¹⁷ Baltimore experienced a 5% population decline from 2019 to 2023. Did the population decline continue in 2024 and 2025 in cities like Baltimore? If so, we should expect the raw numbers of crimes to decline as the population declines, not the result of any policies proposed by the mayor’s office.

Conclusion

We have provided several plausible explanations for why many major U.S. cities seem to be experiencing reductions in homicide numbers over the last couple of years. There could also be additional factors that we did not cover in detail here. The last ten years in the U.S. have seen a surge in anti-police movements, such as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) organization, the Defund the Police movement, and the pushes to eliminate cash bail systems, replace cops with social workers, decriminalize many drug and property crimes, and reduce incarceration rates. Many have argued that these social changes have led to “de-policing,” as some officers choose to no longer engage in proactive enforcement efforts.¹⁸ There is also social science evidence that the de-policing that gained momentum after the 2014 protests that began in Ferguson, Missouri, corresponded with increases in violent and property crime in the years that followed.¹⁹ It is possible that police officers have increased arrest rates, and courts have increased prosecutions and

incarcerations in the face of public outcry as the harmful consequences of these movements were felt in their communities—and that these factors have impacted violent crime rates in many cities.

It is most likely that everything we have discussed here has been working in conjunction to reduce homicides and other violent crimes in the major cities which we analyzed, as well as many other cities across the country. **There are indications that something is leading to fewer homicides and other violent crimes in numerous cities across the country—*despite the fact that these cities have different elected officials, different police leadership, and different policing strategies on the ground.***

It is by no means clear that the apparent decrease in violent crime in different cities is solely caused by a variety of different public safety initiatives and policing strategies that all happen to work in different ways and for different reasons. **It seems much more plausible that by examining what these cities have in common, we can better understand the apparent trend.**

In our next article on this topic, we will be doing just that—looking at social changes within the nation which have led to an aging population and changes in young male behavior, resulting in a demographic landscape with less violent street crime, but a surge in other public order issues handled by the police.

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