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Crime Affects American Communities and Safety

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HIGHLIGHT

While 2023 might bring optimism with declines in certain violent offenses, the surge in carjackings and lingering high murder rates cannot be ignored. Widespread fear of violence threatens our common sense of safety and breeds disbelief in our government's ability to provide security. Women feel particularly vulnerable as America continues to grapple with the aftermath of 2020, "defund the police" rhetoric, and dwindling community spirit.

INTRODUCTION

Crime has long been a concern for cities and communities. Its impact is profound, not just in the sheer number of lives it harms but also in the downstream effect it has on our collective psyche and societal dynamics. [Recent data](#) from the first six months of 2023 sheds some light on changing crime patterns, and these findings necessitate careful contemplation and action.

At first glance, there are reasons to be optimistic. Levels of nearly all offenses, from homicide to aggravated assault, have shown

a decline or remained relatively stable in 2023 when compared to the previous year. The number of homicides in the study cities, for instance, witnessed **a drop of 9.4 percent—translating to 202 fewer lives lost**. Assaults, both aggravated and those involving firearms, also experienced reductions. The overall picture is further bolstered by reductions in robberies, residential burglaries, nonresidential burglaries, and larcenies.

However, it's worth noting that despite the seeming decline in some types of violent crime, crime still remains markedly higher than in 2019—the year before the tumultuous events of the COVID pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, and the subsequent protests and “defund the police movement.” The Council on Criminal Justice’s July **study** underscores this stark reality, revealing that there were 24 percent more homicides in the first half of 2023 compared to the same period in 2019.

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Moreover, there has been a **significant spike** in motor vehicle theft, marking a 33.5 percent surge from 2022. As carjackings involve either violence or the threat of violence, this alarming swell is overwhelming police departments and causing widespread fear.

In 2022, Colorado, California, and Texas topped the **list** with the highest number of reported stolen vehicles. Illinois, though, showed a notable spike **among the top 10 states**, experiencing a surge of approximately 35 percent in thefts from 2021 to 2022. Meanwhile, Washington state wasn’t far behind, with vehicle thefts rising by 31 percent during the same period.

Taking a closer look at 30 specific cities, the figures are even more startling. The Council on Criminal Justice **reports** that in these cities, the rate of vehicle thefts and carjackings skyrocketed, seeing an average increase of 59 percent between 2019 and 2022. For example, **Washington DC** went from approximately 200 carjackings a year in 2018 to more than 1,000 by the end of 2022. A task force was assembled to attempt to curtail the prevalence—to little effect. The situation is so dire in New York City that Mayor Eric Adams **distributed 500 Apple AirTags** to residents. However, actions such as these tend to address the symptoms but not the root cause of the increase in crime.

Unsurprisingly, localized problems—or crime that is concentrated in specific areas—tend to have a magnifying effect and lead to widespread concerns about safety and security, even for those outside that locale.

Moreover, the uncertainty of the trajectory of current homicide rates and the surges in specific crimes are a clarion call. Despite the fact that serious violent crime is below historical heights, it remains alarmingly high, especially in poorer communities of color.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF SAFETY IN AMERICA

Safety, real and perceived, is both a physical and psychological necessity. In America, public perception of safety has long been a barometer indicating not just the efficacy of law enforcement, but also the general health of our communal ties and societal structures.

Recent data, however, suggests that Americans today feel more vulnerable and insecure in their local communities than they have at almost any other point in the last fifty years.

According to a recent [Gallup poll](#), a significant 56 percent of U.S. adults believe that crime in their local area has increased compared to the previous year. This figure marks a five-percentage-point rise since last year and stands as the highest recorded in [Gallup's](#) trend dating back to 1972.

Prolonged and increased levels of fear and worry have profound implications on overall well-being and life satisfaction. Feelings of safety and security are inextricably linked to our sense of happiness, community, and trust in societal structures.

Such a marked surge in perceived local crime is deeply troubling. When we shift our gaze to the national level, the picture is equally disconcerting. A staggering [78 percent of Americans](#) feel that crime has risen across the country, a figure tied with the sentiments of 2020. To put this in historical context, the peak of this sentiment was recorded in 1992, when [89 percent felt this way](#)—a time when the nation was grappling with soaring crime rates as more violent crimes were reported than ever recorded. [Nearly two million](#) murders, rapes, assaults, and robberies occurred in 1992, with more than 850,000 of the victims being children.

Today's data reflect similar sentiments. The fears surrounding being sexually assaulted, mugged, murdered, attacked while driving, one's child being physically harmed at school, or having one's home burglarized while present have all seen marked increases. Of these, the fear around children's safety saw the most [significant increase—by 13 points](#)—to a near majority (47 percent) of parents possessing this concern.

It is reasonable to connect these escalating fears to high-profile incidents such as a young girl's [rape in a Loudoun County school bathroom](#), which was grossly mishandled, or the [horrific Uvalde, Texas school shooting](#), the deadliest since the Sandy Hook shooting.

Incidents like these not only dominate news cycles but also seep into our collective consciousness, amplifying fears and driving public perception even if one is far removed from the epicenters of these tragedies.

Prolonged and increased levels of fear and worry have [profound implications](#) on overall well-being and life satisfaction. [Feelings of safety and security](#) are inextricably linked to our sense of happiness, community, and trust in societal structures. When these feelings are eroded, the subsequent loss of faith is not limited to law enforcement or local governance. There's a broader, more profound disillusionment that can set in. These sentiments have a cascading effect, leading not just to reduced well-being but also to dwindling faith in the very structures meant to safeguard us, as evidenced by [only two in ten Americans](#) trusting the government to do what is right.

THE EROSION OF SAFETY AND THE RISE OF FEMALE GUN OWNERSHIP IN AMERICA

In a nation that heralds freedom and protection as core values, the increasing vulnerability felt by its citizens—especially women—is cause for deep concern. It's worth considering that catastrophic loss of faith in

the government's ability to effectively govern is driving a surge in personal protection measures. Central to this rise is women's gun ownership.

From 2005 to 2020, there has been a **77-percent increase**. Such a significant rise does not occur in a vacuum; it likely reflects deep-seated fears and perceived threats to personal safety. For black women, this fear is even more pronounced. A **study** highlighted that the firearm homicide rate for this group has more than tripled since 2010. Unsurprisingly, the 2021 **National Firearms Survey** reported that almost 30 percent of new female gun owners are black.

The backdrop against which these figures emerge is riddled with chilling data on domestic violence and femicide. The American Journal of Emergency Medicine reported a growing global trend—**domestic violence cases have surged** by 25 to 33 percent, with the U.S. mirroring this trajectory.

Globally, femicide—the intentional murder of women because of their gender—is often associated with low-income countries. However, this preconception obscures a harsh reality. A staggering 70 percent of all femicide cases in high-income nations occur in the U.S. The nation ranks 34th globally for intentional female homicides, with a rate of 2.6 killings per 100,000 women.

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The Violence Policy Center (VPC) **reported** in 2019 that 90 percent of murdered women in the U.S. were known to their male perpetrators. An overwhelming majority of these women were either wives or

intimate partners of these men. The reality becomes even grimmer when focusing on communities of color. In **Minnesota**, despite comprising only 1 percent of the state's population, American Indian women accounted for a staggering 9 percent of all female homicides from 2010 to 2019, as reported by the Minnesota Task Force on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. In 2019, black women and girls faced a **homicide rate** more than double that of their white counterparts.

This landscape further underscores the pressing need for spaces exclusively for women. While personal protection—such as firearm ownership—may be a reaction to the immediate threat environment, it is equally crucial to recognize women are feeling increasingly less safe. Championing spaces that foster security, camaraderie, and empowerment solely for biological females may increase feelings of safety.

THE DEFUND MOVEMENT AND THE RAMIFICATIONS FOR POLICING AND PUBLIC SAFETY

At the height of such crime spikes and decreases in feelings of safety, the seismic shift in attitudes toward policing is paradoxical. Propelled by high-profile incidents like the George Floyd killing, the “defund the police” movement gained considerable traction, particularly between 2020 and 2021.

The fallout has been significant. Many police departments across the nation are grappling

with a **decline in staffing** due to an increase in resignations, retirements, and challenges in recruitment.

Data underscore the scale of the challenge. Resignations surged by nearly 50 percent in 2022 compared to figures from 2019. Even as retirements saw a slight dip in 2022, they were still nearly 20 percent higher than those in 2019. The cumulative effect of these trends is that total sworn staffing has reduced by nearly 5 percent in three years. This decline in numbers poses not only an operational challenge but significantly impacts the potential implementation of solutions that increase safety and stability.

The significance of a full-strength police department lies not just in numbers but in its ability to adopt and implement strategies like community-based policing, which have been shown to build trust in communities and drive down crime.

The situation in Tulsa, Oklahoma, serves as a glaring example of this crisis. In a city where the violent crime rate is twice the national average, the police force struggles with staffing shortfalls, with 160 vacant officer positions. As Mayor G.T. Bynum **highlighted** in his “State of the City” address last November, having a reduced force—where 800 officers are expected to cover the responsibilities of 1,000—makes public safety Tulsa’s most pressing challenge. Bynum assessed this was the result of the ongoing “toxic national dialogue that demonized police officers.”

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This approach promotes a philosophy wherein the police form collaborative partnerships with communities to address

public safety issues—including crime, social disorder, and the pervasive fear of crime. To execute community policing successfully, organizational structures must ensure that local patrol officers possess decision-making authority and are accountable. Achieving this typically involves long-term assignments, nurturing officers as generalists, and deploying special units judiciously. All of this is achievable only if departments are at full strength and are not resource-constrained.

In 1992, President Bill Clinton recognized the necessity of more police to address America’s crime epidemic. His **COPS initiative** led to more than \$14 billion to support community

policing efforts and funded roughly 125,000 additional officers in more than 13,000 law enforcement agencies across the country. In 2005, the Government Accountability Office **found** that “as a demonstration of whether a federal program can affect crime through hiring officers and changing policing practices, the evidence indicates that COPS contributed to declines in crime above the levels of declines that would have been expected without it.”

This effort and its success demonstrate that supporting police and their hiring to make Americans and our streets safe once was (and still should be) a bipartisan issue.

THE COLLAPSE OF COMMUNITY IN AMERICA

Crime rates, increasing perceptions of fear, the intensified scrutiny of police forces, and the inability of the government to protect its people are becoming hallmarks of

contemporary American life. These issues are symptomatic of a more profound problem: the collapse of community in America.

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Today, this once vibrant sense of community is waning. The erosion of these bonds and subsequent decline in neighborliness is described in Marc Dunkelman’s book, “The Vanishing Neighbor.”

Dunkelman posits that Americans predominantly engage in three levels of relationships. The innermost circle, composed of family and intimate friends, remains relatively robust. The outermost circle, expanded by technology and social media, allows for a substantial number of superficial connections based on shared interests. However, it’s the middle circle—composed of casual acquaintances, neighbors, and community volunteers—that is suffering.

This middle ring historically served as the binding factor of communities. It provided opportunities for genuine interactions, the sharing of ideas, and the development of mutual trust. As Americans retreat from this middle circle, opting for the comfort of their inner circles or the convenience of their outer ones, communities suffer. The result is an increasing polarization in society, where echo chambers are preferred over town hall discussions and where algorithms dictate and reinforce siloed beliefs.

This isolation from our immediate community doesn’t just harm societal cohesion—it affects our individual well-being. Human beings are **innately social creatures**, wired to form bonds and collaborate. Engaging in acts of community service, helping a neighbor, or simply participating in local events is **intrinsically rewarding**. Such actions don’t just benefit recipients; they enhance the well-being of the benefactors. Moreover, the decline in

community engagement has another adverse consequence: a **decline in civic responsibility**.

ADDRESS CRIME AND BUILD TRUST

The clear need for effective policing that maintains public safety while building community trust is more crucial than ever. As crime patterns evolve and societal challenges change, our police departments must be equipped, trained, and supported in ways that allow them to best serve the communities they protect.

Widespread Consensus on Crucial Police Reforms

One of the most heartening developments in recent times is the widespread consensus that has emerged across the political spectrum on key policing initiatives that build trust and transparency.

Both sides of the aisle recognize the importance of measures such as:

- Requiring officers to **wear body cameras**, ensuring transparency and accountability in their interactions with the public.

- Mandating independent investigations of officer-involved shootings to avoid potential conflicts of interest.
- Creating a national registry of police misconduct records, ensuring that problematic officers can't easily move between jurisdictions without accountability.

Such measures are not about undermining the police; they are about strengthening the bond between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

Reaffirm Commitment to Law Enforcement

It is incumbent upon our **political** and community leaders to **reaffirm** their unwavering commitment to the law enforcement community. This commitment is not just in terms of resources but also in terms of respect and collaboration. When officers know that they are valued and supported, they can perform their duties with confidence and professionalism.

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Look to Past Program Efficacy

Richmond's **Project Exile** stands as a compelling example of a program that achieved tangible results in tackling violent crime. Launched during a period when Richmond was grappling with some of the highest homicide rates in the nation, this initiative was rooted in a straightforward idea: target felons with firearms and prosecute them under federal law, ensuring harsher sentences, no bail, and no early release.

This “swift and certain” penalty approach was advertised widely, from city buses to business cards, making the community aware of the intensified consequences of firearm offenses. The results spoke for themselves as the program not only incapacitated potential repeat offenders but also acted as a powerful deterrent for those considering firearm-related crimes.

Rekindling Love for Community and Country

The heart of effective policing and safe communities is a populace that loves and values its surroundings. While strong law enforcement strategies like Project Exile are vital, equally important are policies that foster community cohesion and pride. Beautiful, well-maintained public spaces—be they parks, community gardens, centers, or libraries—play an essential role in building connections among residents. When people have shared spaces where they can come together, interact, and appreciate

their surroundings, it fosters a sense of community, belonging, and collective guardianship.

The path forward for safer communities and trusted law enforcement lies in a multi-faceted approach. It requires robust funding for police, commitment to community-based policing, adoption of effective crime deterrence strategies, and fostering love for our communities and nation.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Get Informed

Learn more about Safety and Security: Visit:

- [Petition: Support Safety and Security of Communities](#)
- [Policy Focus: Gun Control Doesn't Make Us Safer](#)
- [Policy Focus: Stopping the Epidemic of Violence in American Cities](#)

Talk to Your Friends

Help your friends and family understand these important issues. Share this information, tell them about what's going on and encourage them to join you in getting involved.

Become a Leader in the Community

Start an Independent Women's Network chapter group so you can get together with friends each month to talk about a political/policy issue (it will be fun!). Write a letter to the editor. Show up at local government meetings and make your opinions known. Go to rallies. Better yet, organize rallies! A few motivated people can change the world.

Remain Engaged Politically

Too many good citizens see election time as the only time they need to pay attention to politics. We need everyone to pay attention and hold elected officials accountable. Let your Representatives know your opinions. After all, they are supposed to work for you!

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