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REIMAGINE JUSTICE

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**EXECUTIVE SESSION  
ON THE FUTURE OF  
JUSTICE POLICY**

**MARCH 2021**

Elizabeth Glazer,  
Former Director  
of the New York  
City Mayor's Office  
of Criminal Justice

Patrick Sharkey,  
Princeton University

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# **SOCIAL FABRIC: A NEW MODEL FOR PUBLIC SAFETY AND VITAL NEIGHBORHOODS**

**The Square One Project aims to incubate new thinking on our response to crime, promote more effective strategies, and contribute to a new narrative of justice in America.**

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The Executive Session was created with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as part of the Safety and Justice Challenge, which seeks to reduce over-incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails.



Supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

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# INTRODUCTION

**“After decades of relying on aggressive, zero-tolerance policing designed to dominate city streets, New York City was moving away from police enforcement and criminal justice system operations as the exclusive responses to violent crime...”**

**“The new model is driven by the ideal of integration, and relies on weaving together a social fabric composed of residents and community institutions, upheld by the social supports that government budgets are intended to nurture.”**

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**It is hard to remember what New York City was like back in February of 2020, before a virus tore through its neighborhoods, demonstrations took over city streets, riot-gearred police officers confronted New Yorkers in encounters streamed to the world, and a surge of shootings led to a summer of violence unlike any other in recent years. But it is important to think back.**

**New York City, we argue, was taking gradual steps toward a new model of public safety and community strength. After decades of relying on aggressive, zero-tolerance policing designed to dominate city streets, the city was moving away from police enforcement and criminal justice system operations as the exclusive responses to violent crime. It was slowly turning toward a “lighter touch” approach that relied on evidence-informed, theory-based strategies, like creating vibrant public spaces and summer youth employment, and toward community-oriented institutions and residents as central actors in the effort to build vital, safe neighborhoods. Those strategies were part of an integrated approach to increase safety while decreasing the reach of the justice system into the lives of New Yorkers.**

**This intrusion had sharpened cynicism, especially in communities of color, as to how much justice or safety the system delivered.**

**The change was gradual and incomplete, but several data points suggest the new model was working. Crime declined as the city’s incarcerated population fell to a rate that more resembled the dramatically lower rates of the nations of Western Europe than the United States, and judges began to use different approaches to ensure accountability. Arrests also had dropped significantly over time, the New York City Police Department (NYPD) had mostly ended the use of stop, question, and frisk, and prosecutors had started to exercise their discretion to focus more on serious crime.**

**As this lighter touch approach took hold, conditions in the city’s most disadvantaged neighborhoods did not deteriorate as some had predicted they would. Inequality in New York City remains staggering, but poverty fell gradually over the 2010s, and wages rose fastest for workers near the bottom of the wage distribution (New York City Mayor’s Office for**

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**Economic Opportunity 2020). The dropout rate for public high school students had fallen to about half of what it was in 2007 (New York City Department of Education 2021). And violence remained at a historically low level. Among more than 8.5 million people scattered around the five boroughs of New York, 319 were murdered in 2019, a fraction of the rate of other large American cities and a fraction of New York City's own murder rate decades before.**

**This history, though recent, may seem a distant memory after everything the city went through in 2020, but we believe it is crucially important to interpreting the events of the past year and to developing a plan to move forward. The tumult and trauma of 2020 reveal both how fragile and limited the city's progress was, and how flawed the justice system is as the central approach to achieving safety. But what the city has experienced also adds urgency, and provides an opportunity, for a transformative change in the coming years. COVID-19 has forced a distillation of the choices before us, and the fiscal crisis that has followed offers an opportunity to reshape how cities achieve safety and thriving neighborhoods.**

**In this essay we lay out a model of public safety that shifts away from law enforcement and toward residents and local organizations, supported by access to organized government services, as the primary mode of achieving wellbeing. The old model relied on the surveillance, management, and removal of disadvantaged, marginalized New Yorkers from the city's streets for a wide variety of low-level violations. The new model is driven by the ideal of integration, and relies on weaving together a social fabric composed of residents and community institutions, upheld by the social supports that government budgets are intended to nurture. Importantly, the new model rests not on lofty ideals nor on the prevailing political whims of the moment, but on a body of the most rigorous evidence available. Law enforcement should continue to play a role in this new model, but the police (and other actors and institutions within the criminal justice system) need to be seen as just one part of a larger, collective, and civilian effort to build vibrant, safe neighborhoods through a heterogenous mix of strategies. We put forward a proposal to re-orient deployment of government resources and a demonstration project as tangible steps toward implementation.**



# THE OLD MODEL

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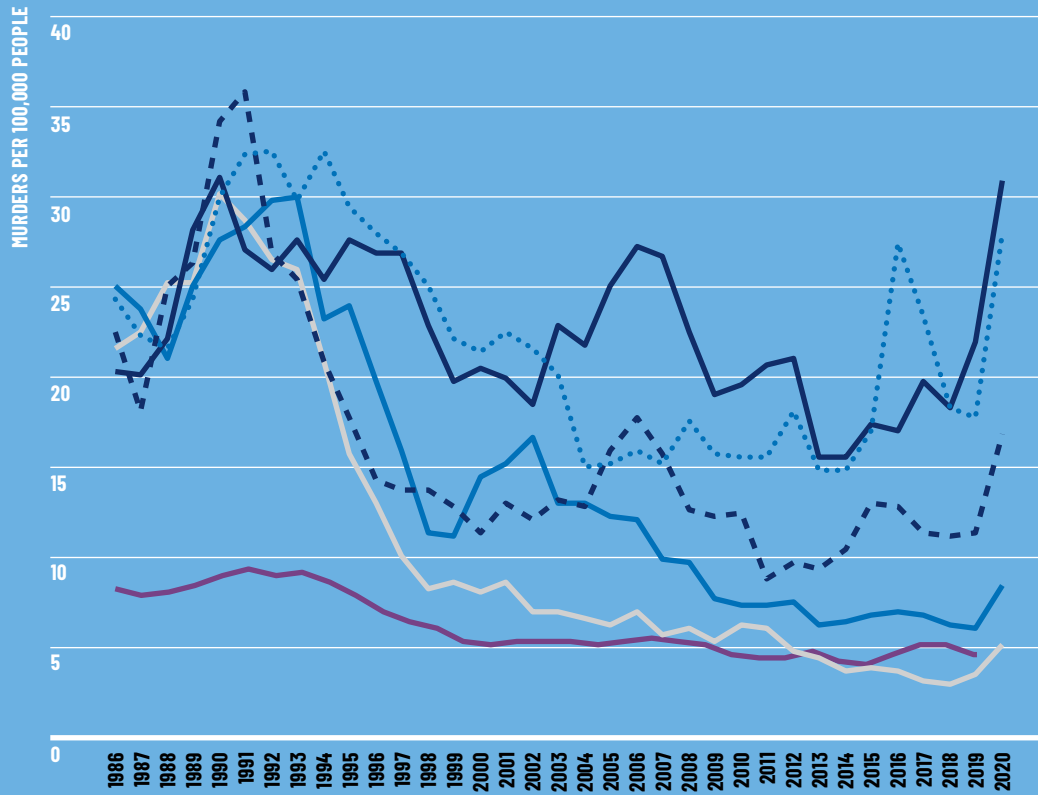
**From the late 1960s through the mid-1990s, New York was one of many major cities that went through a period of crisis marked by widespread joblessness, outmigration of the middle class, concentrated poverty, retrenchment of social services, and rising violent crime.**

Central city communities were abandoned by the federal government; resources were extracted; schools, housing developments, churches, parks, and playgrounds emptied out or crumbled; crack cocaine appeared; and neighborhoods began to fall apart. The places left behind were plagued by violence.

The national murder rate rose from just over 4 murders for every 100,000 residents in the early 1960s to over 10 murders for every 100,000 residents in the late 1980s (Sharkey 2018)(see Figure 1). In New York City alone, more than 2,000 people were murdered annually in the first few years of the 1990s, a rate of over 30 murders for every 100,000 New Yorkers (see Figure 2). It was not simply the pervasiveness of the violence and the omnipresence of fear that had such

an impact on city life, it was also the nature of the violence taking place. A collective feeling of desperation and confusion took hold as seemingly minor incidents escalated to violence, and as entire neighborhoods seemed to be taken over by groups who were willing to use force for any reason.

The abandonment of central city neighborhoods, which came in the form of federal and state disinvestment, austerity politics, and migration to the suburbs, also came with a new approach to dealing with violence, characterized by punishment (Phillips-Fein 2017). The national imprisonment rate had hovered around 100 state and federal prisoners for every 100,000 Americans for most of the country's history, and then it skyrocketed



**FIGURE 1**

**Change in murder rates from 1985–2020 in the Five Largest US Cities.**

Sources: New York City’s Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice 2019; FBI UCR 2019; Crivelli 2021; Rector 2021; Philadelphia Police Department 2021; and D’Onofrio and Wall 2021.

- USA
- NYC
- Los Angeles
- Philadelphia
- - - Houston
- ..... Chicago

to over 500 per 100,000 beginning in 1970 and continued to rise to levels unprecedented in U.S. history and unmatched across the world (Western 2006). Prosecutors aggressively pursued the harshest sentences possible, leading to rapidly rising rates of incarceration. Federal, state, and local resources contributed to bolstering police forces and political leaders gave police the charge to take over city streets, sometimes with brute force (Pfaff 2017).

This model was refined in New York City. In 1990, the high-water mark for murders in the city, William Bratton became head of the city's transit police, at that time separate from the NYPD. If the streets above ground were dangerous and disorderly, the subways seemed entirely outside the control of any formal authority. Walls of subway cars were covered with graffiti, trains broke down regularly, and doors didn't open. Bratton's close adviser was George Kelling, a criminologist most celebrated for an Atlantic Monthly article he wrote in 1982 with James Q. Wilson, called "Broken Windows." Wilson and Kelling argued that visible cues of disorder, like a broken window, provide a signal that the space is out of control, invite more violations of social norms, and begin a process leading to lawlessness and urban decay. This cycle, if not stopped early, escalates into bigger problems—a broken window invites squatters, who give way to crack

dealers, who resort to violence to defend their territory. Significantly for subsequent policing trends, the authors suggested that the policing of social norms and "deviant behavior," often activated by calls from private residents, was the best antidote to these conditions of disorder. As head of the transit police, Bratton took these lessons and applied them both to the physical conditions of the subways (graffiti) and to the activity that he believed contributed to the breakdown in social controls (turnstile jumping) (Zimring 2011).

In 1994, Mayor Rudy Giuliani made Bratton head of the NYPD and Bratton brought with him this new style of policing, which gradually expanded beyond its focus on simply the physical conditions—the "broken windows"—and turned into a zero-tolerance approach of stopping or arresting every possible 'trouble-maker' on the street and below ground. The style of aggressive policing introduced by Bratton gave force to an idea of satisfying simplicity, if disputed veracity: not only is crime controllable, but police actions are central to that control. As crime dropped year after year, every other measure of police activity rose (New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services 2020a; New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services 2021; City of New York 2021).

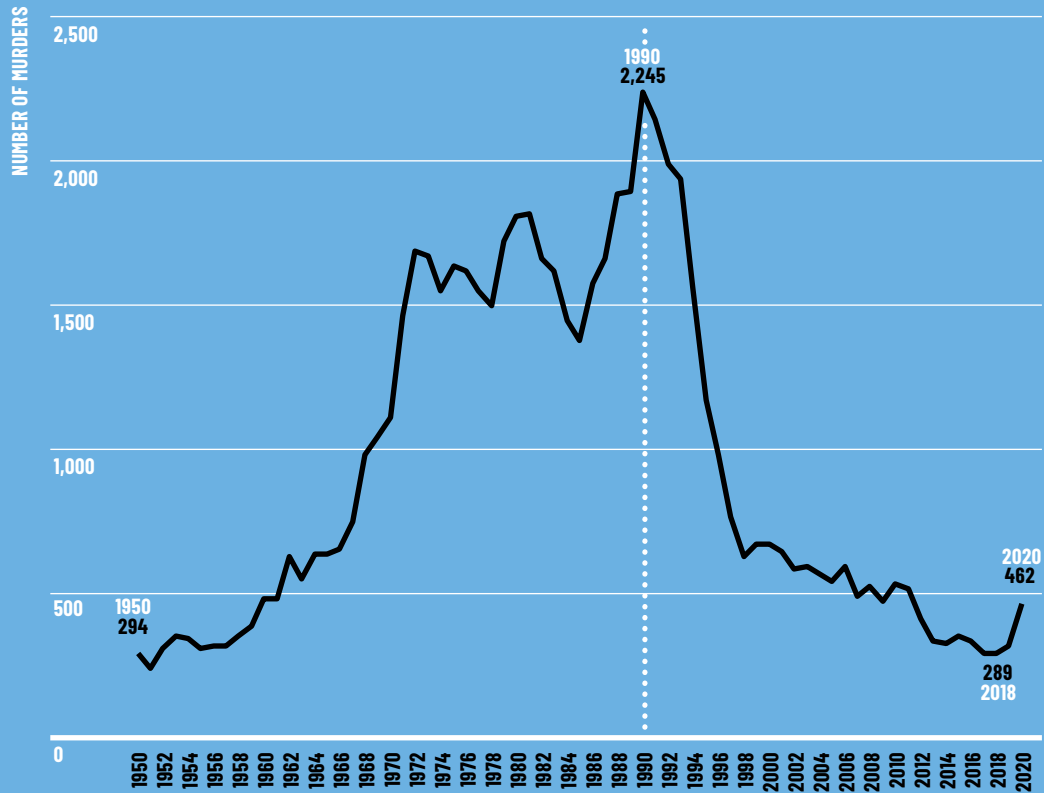
While violence fell rapidly over the 1990s, the debate still rages as to how much credit

this new style of policing and criminal justice deserves (Zimring 2011; Meares 2014). At the time, however, the stunning drop in crime, the “New York Miracle,” was miraculous indeed. From 1990 to 1998 the annual number of murders fell 70 percent, from 2,245 to 649, the sharpest drop in murders that the city has ever experienced

(see Figure 2). It landed Bratton twice on the cover of Time magazine, and it led to a police-centric model of crime control that was quickly adopted by cities across the country and the world (Goldman 2014).



**THE STYLE OF AGGRESSIVE POLICING INTRODUCED BY BRATTON GAVE FORCE TO AN IDEA OF SATISFYING SIMPLICITY, IF DISPUTED VERACITY: NOT ONLY IS CRIME CONTROLLABLE, BUT POLICE ACTIONS ARE CENTRAL TO THAT CONTROL**



## FIGURE 2

### New York City Murders.

Source: Wikipedia 2021.



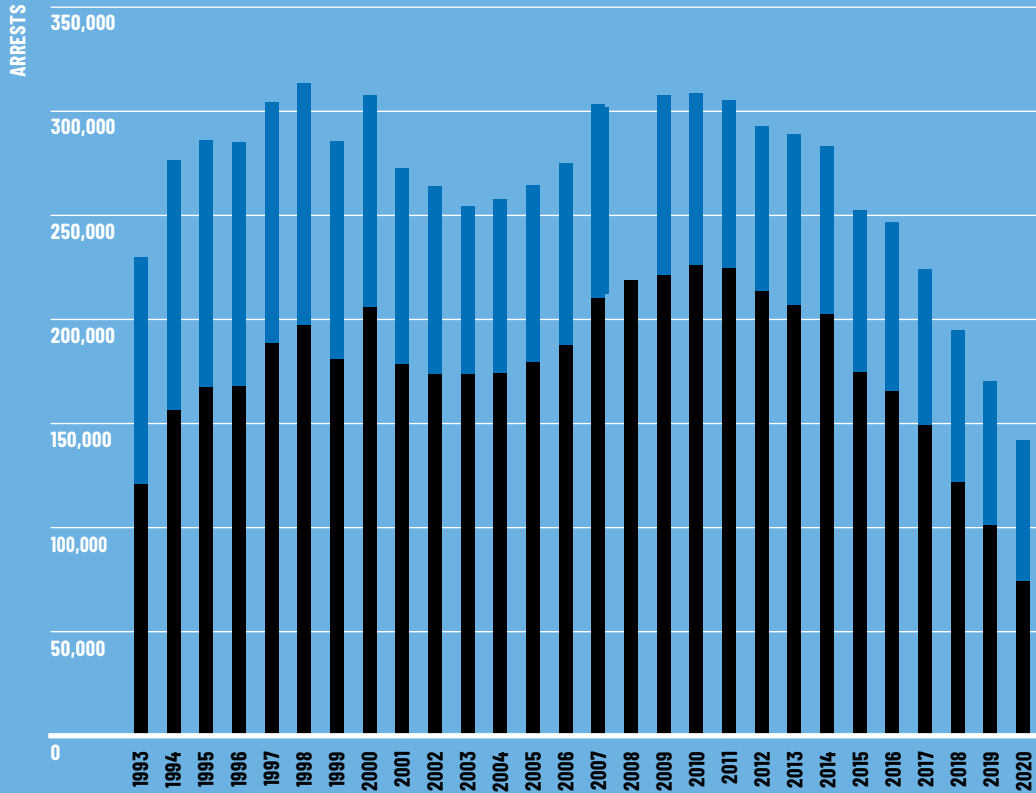
## OVER THE NEXT 30 YEARS, THE USE OF POLICE FOR MANY CIVIC FUNCTIONS AND THE DEFERENCE TO THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AS THE PRIMARY TOOL TO FIGHT CRIME BECAME THE DEFAULT APPROACH TO SAFETY IN THE MINDS OF AMERICANS AND THE ACTIONS OF THEIR ELECTED LEADERS

The conceptual breakthrough—that police can control crime—combined with the apparent success achieved through strategic and nimble deployment of a force presence in every neighborhood, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, provided a powerful reason for New York City’s mayors to rely on the police to deal with crime. Soon, police were performing other functions that might have more naturally been considered the province of service agencies. It became natural for mayors to use police authority to address other symptoms of “disorder,” such as the presence of unhoused people on the streets or the visible distress of addiction and mental illness (MacDonald, Kaba, Rosner, Vise, Weiss, Brittner, Skerker, Dickey, and Venters 2015). As the lines blurred between social distress and criminal behavior, so did the respective roles of city agencies and the police. Many mayors were content to have a clear answer to the problem of crime, and the price of this approach would not become fully visible until later.

Over the next 30 years, this approach to policing and the deference to the criminal justice system as the primary tool to fight crime became the default approach to safety in the minds of Americans and the actions of their elected leaders. Crime fell, but the presence and the activity of police grew. Murder declined by 86 percent between 1990 and 2019, but the number

of uniformed police officers on the street increased from 26,000 to almost 40,000.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, felony and misdemeanor arrests hit a recent high of 312,399 in 2010 (see Figure 3) and other indications of the growing presence of enforcement in the lives of New Yorkers were reflected in the rise of stops to almost 700,000 in 2011 (see Figure 4) and summonses to 540,000 in 2010 (New York City’s Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice 2019). These actions were largely concentrated in communities of color.

This style of intrusive policing had a significant and deleterious effect on residents’ views of cops in the most heavily policed neighborhoods (Brunson and Wade 2019; Tyler, Fagan, and Geller 2014). Even as violence fell, anger and resentment toward the police and the city government grew as young men of color were stopped and frisked at exponentially rising rates and made to feel like suspects whenever they walked down the street. Thousands of New Yorkers were behind bars or otherwise enmeshed in the criminal justice system, many for minor offenses (Kohler-Hausmann 2018). Separate from its impact on crime, widespread cynicism and resentment toward the NYPD, especially in communities of color, is a central part of the legacy of the old model of violence prevention (Geller and Fagan 2019; Bell 2016; CBS New York 2019). □



**FIGURE 3**

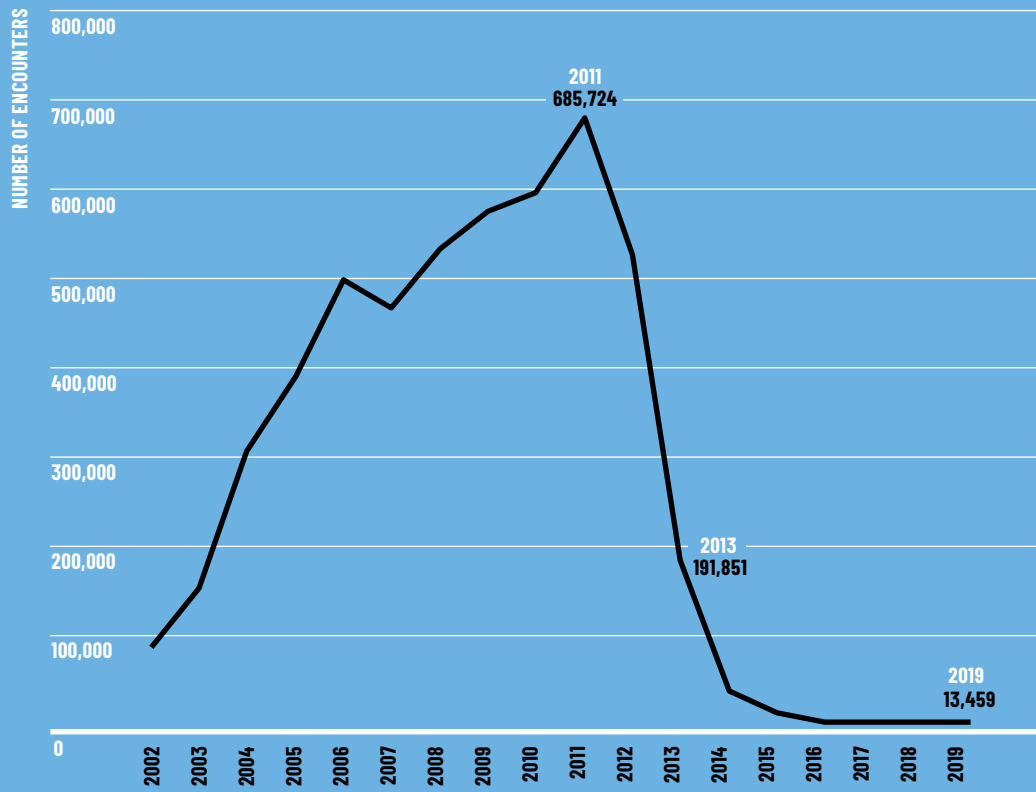
**Felony and Misdemeanor Arrests in New York City, 1993-2020.**

Source: New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services 2020a.

Note: 1993-2019 data are from above source. 2020 arrests are from a non-published monthly NYPD Criminal Justice Bureau December 2020 report received by Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice via email: "Arrest/Arrestment Indicators."

■ Felony arrests  
 ■ Misdemeanor arrests





## FIGURE 4

**New York City Stop  
and Frisk Annual  
Encounters  
2002-2019.**

Source: City  
of New York 2021.

# THE NEW MODEL

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## **Vowing to end the “tale of two cities,” Bill de Blasio ran as a champion of the city’s poor and became mayor in January 2014.**

Many credited the success of his campaign to his relentless and passionate attack on the overuse of police stops and their pernicious effect on the health of families and communities of color. A proud “progressive,” de Blasio promised a government that looked like the faces of the city, attuned to needs of the working poor, including affordable housing and universal pre-K (De Blasio 2013).

The prospect of a new approach, scaling back the presence of the police and scaling up access to opportunity, brought hope to some but sparked anxiety in others. An array of voices, from the police unions to the city’s elites, expressed a steady drumbeat of concern that de Blasio would be unable to keep the city safe with his “soft” approach to crime (Rosario and O’Neill 2013; Goldenberg 2013; Goldman 2014; Saul 2014). De Blasio chose for his

first police commissioner, Bill Bratton, the father of the very stop and frisk policies that a federal court had ruled unconstitutional (Goodman 2013). The choice represented a tension that was to dog his mayoralty. For some of de Blasio’s supporters, Bratton’s appointment was a realpolitik moment to quiet critics and provide a Nixon-in-China credibility to implement the reform platform. For others, it raised a reasonable doubt as to the new mayor’s commitment to the progressive policies on which he ran. This tension, between the mayor’s inclination to defer to the police on public safety policy and his acknowledgement of the harms inflicted, particularly on communities of color, by a police dominant approach became a flash point in 2020 as the pressures of the pandemic increased.

## PUTTING THE “PUBLIC” BACK IN “PUBLIC SAFETY”<sup>2</sup>

The new administration moved quickly to reshape the problem to be solved as not simply “how to reduce crime” but “how to create safety” (Glazer 2019). “To create safety” signaled an approach that would be less about just the absence of crime, and more about the presence of wellbeing and opportunity, a strategy “owned” by community and not just police. This wasn’t just semantics: it was a shift away from policies of negation (arrest and incarcerate) and toward policies of creation (strengthen family, nurture neighborhood connections and networks, transform public spaces, and open up jobs).

If “reducing crime” is about the operations of the criminal justice system, “creating safety” centers on a community-led and government supported enterprise. The solutions in

a community centered approach to wellbeing are diverse and move beyond handcuffs and jail. The new approach recognizes that the criminal justice system—police, prosecutors, courts, jails, and prisons—has a role in creating safety and that the hydraulics of the system require deep coordination among all the decision-makers. But the criminal justice system is just a piece—done right, an ever-shrinking piece—of a larger civic enterprise to build a thriving city. Both of these approaches—creating safety by building neighborhoods fueled by coordinated civic goods, and reshaping the uses of the criminal justice system to limit its sometimes-toxic effect, particularly on New Yorkers of color—were key to building a new model for public safety over the next seven years (Glazer 2019; New York City’s Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice 2019).



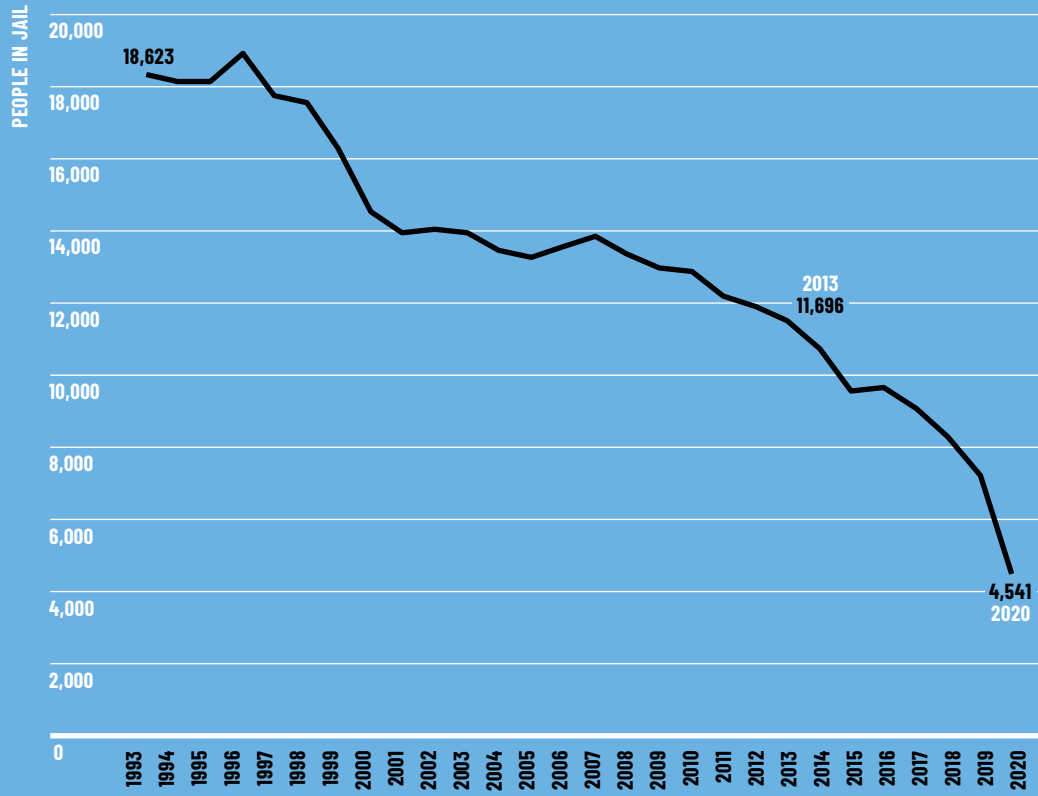
**THE NEW APPROACH RECOGNIZES THAT THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM HAS A ROLE IN CREATING SAFETY BUT IT IS JUST A PIECE—DONE RIGHT, AN EVER-SHRINKING PIECE—OF A LARGER CIVIC ENTERPRISE TO BUILD A THRIVING CITY**

## SHRINKING THE FOOTPRINT

This new approach had a dramatic impact: from 2013 to 2019 the city experienced a massive reduction in arrests and jail population, even as crime continued to decline (New York City’s Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice 2019). The changes were the result of a confluence of factors. With crime at the lowest it had been since the 1960s, decision-makers were freer to look more closely at solutions that did not rely exclusively on the harshest measures of the criminal justice system (New York City Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice 2020a). At the same time, the overuse of police powers—particularly in the growth of stop and frisk—had resulted in an almost universal acknowledgment that the policies of the last 30 years had come at too great a cost. The heavy reliance on police and the justice system bred a cynicism in communities of color about the efficacy and fairness of the system. This estrangement fed a vicious cycle where victims of crime often would not testify and jurors and grand jurors were often skeptical of law enforcement witnesses (New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services 2020b).<sup>3</sup> Finally, there were

urgent questions, powered by the newly organized and heard voices of the formerly incarcerated, around whether jail was the right place or the criminal justice system the right tool for the many people who became enmeshed in it.

Between 2014 and 2020, a broad array of reforms, developed with the advice of hundreds of people from formerly incarcerated people to judges, resulted in a drop of 70 percent in the jail population (New York City’s Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice 2020b; New York City’s Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice 2019)(see Figure 5).<sup>4</sup> These reforms included programs that judges could offer defendants instead of jail; “crisis intervention” training for cops who encountered people with behavioral health issues; and supportive housing to interrupt the cycle of those shifting from shelters to emergency rooms to jail. The mayor pledged to close the city’s jails, located on an island in the East River, and instead to build humane facilities for a significantly reduced number of people in the city centers, close to courts, families, and services (City of New York 2017).



## FIGURE 5

**New York City  
Jail Population,  
1993-2020.**

Source: New York  
City Mayor's Office of  
Criminal Justice 2021b.

Policing also changed, accelerated not just by the mayor's campaign commitments, but also by the deaths in 2014 of Eric Garner in New York City and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, the two events less than a month apart and just a few months into de Blasio's first year in office. The video of Garner's death pulled back the curtain, with a shocking transparency, on the banal use of force that can accompany some routine police actions. It was an elbow to the face of every New Yorker, insistently asking: is selling loosies worth a man's life? How and when should police exercise their unique privilege to use up to deadly force? When does police violence violate the implicit agreement between residents and their government about how, when, and against whom it may be used? At what point is the right to use force forfeited or does the balance change so the social compact must be rewritten? These were the questions that underlay all the changes to come but they broke through again with intense insistence in the summer of 2020.

Garner's death added urgency to a set of reforms underway that retrenched the reach

of police into the everyday lives of people of color and shifted away from police power as the dominant approach to order. Stop and frisks, which had dropped significantly in the two years before de Blasio took office, now dropped even more precipitously so that by the end of 2019 there were 93 percent fewer stops than there had been at the height of the practice (City of New York 2021) (see Figure 4).

Marijuana arrests—a bellwether of disparate enforcement where evidence shows equal use among Black people and White people—dropped 90 percent (New York City's Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice 2018a). A new statute offered the option for a civil ticket instead of a criminal summons for an array of low-level violations, from being in a park after dark to drinking in public, leading to a 94 percent reduction in criminal summonses (New York City's Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice 2018b). And the almost 800,000 warrants issued more than ten years before for those same lower level offenses were wiped out (New York City's Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice 2016; CBS New York 2017).



**FROM 2013 TO 2019 THE CITY EXPERIENCED A MASSIVE REDUCTION IN ARRESTS AND JAIL POPULATION, EVEN AS CRIME CONTINUED TO DECLINE**

## BUILDING COMMUNITY

As the operations and size of the justice system changed, a new community-based and prevention-oriented strategy to reduce violence was emerging that provided a vivid counterpoint to the past thirty years of police-centric, after-the-harm approach. Two examples, the city's Crisis Management System (CMS) and the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety (MAP), both focus on building on the strengths of neighborhoods and residents. Both have demonstrated track records in reducing crime and increasing safety. Each approach is rooted in a long history of theory and common sense that shows that people obey the law when they are respected and have voice, believe decision-makers are fair, decisions transparent and thus legitimate (legitimacy); and that connection among neighbors strengthens social bonds that stop harmful behavior in the first place (collective efficacy) (Tyler 2006; Sampson and Wilson 2013).

CMS is a federation of approximately 60 organizations operating in the 25 neighborhoods that account for 60 percent of the city's shootings (New York City Mayor's Office to Prevent Gun Violence 2021). For decades, gun violence has settled with grim regularity in the same few neighborhoods. Brownsville, Mott

Haven and East New York are familiar names in a rollcall of distress that starts with high unemployment, low educational achievement, low birth rates, and high rates of asthma and diabetes and ends in violence (Data2Go 2021). As many commentators have noted, these social conditions were spurred by decades of policies that marked these communities as places of disinvestment, including redlining, school segregation, and housing discrimination, that intentionally barred people of color from access to civic goods. Most recently, high rates of COVID-19 infection and death have been added to this suffering (New York City Department of Health 2020).

Violence affects everything, rending families and neighbors and imposing unbearable trauma and wariness that threads through the lives of residents. Its effects on every aspect of life is perhaps most telling in the reduction in school achievement when a student is exposed to violence (Sharkey, Schwartz, Ellen, and Lacoé 2014). Trauma and wariness are also bound up in the acute ambivalence to police action: why don't you respond quickly when I call about a shooting? Why are you hassling my son on his way to school? There is a vicious cycle of disaffection from police—fueled by neighborhood perceptions that police



are unresponsive and ineffective—that depresses the inclination to call the police. This spurs further distrust, including failure to report or bear witness, again undermining trust in police efficacy (Brunson 2020; The New York Times 2016-2017).

CMS recognizes both neighborhood trauma and the intimacy of violence, with victims and perpetrators often locked in cycles of attack and retaliation within a few square blocks (Butts, Roman, Bostwick, and Porter 2015). Non-profits, closely associated with the people in the neighborhood they serve, employ violence interrupters and mental health workers to deliver services to heal the multiple effects of the violence. The “interrupters” develop deep connections with people who may be on the path to violence and, supported by neighborhood information about when disputes are developing and where retaliations will take place, are able to “interrupt” the trajectory before it becomes violent.

Additionally, a set of public actions underscore the community’s condemnation of violence. Every time there is a shooting, the neighborhood organizes a vigil to which all are welcome and many come: neighborhood residents, the bereaved, representatives from non-profits, and elected officials. It is a moment of support and reflection, a physical expression of the peace that the neighborhood expects

and will enforce. Other activities like occupying corners and walking through streets most plagued by gun violence engage the entire neighborhood with this same goal of re-enforcing positive norms. Support for everyone bound together in the neighborhood fabric is paramount (Butts and Delgado 2017; Delgado, Alsbahi, and Butts 2017). Independent evaluations of CMS have shown that gun violence dropped by 30 percent in the neighborhoods where it is in place, compared to similarly-situated neighborhoods without it (Delgado, Alsbahi, Wolff, Alexander, Cobar, and Butts 2017).

MAP operates in the public housing developments that drive 20 percent of the violent crime in public housing. It focuses on the conditions that incubate violence by bringing together a vibrant assemblage of “experts:” residents, cops, staff from parks, sanitation workers, homeless services agency representatives, and a range of leaders and staff from city and nonprofit agencies and community-based organizations. At regular meetings, referred to as “NeighborhoodStat,” this group comes together as equals using a disciplined and cooperative look at data and lived experience to pool and implement solutions, ranging from redesigning public spaces and engaging youth in community programming, to ensuring trash piling outside a housing development is picked up. Among some key and lasting strategies have been the systematic expansion of summer youth



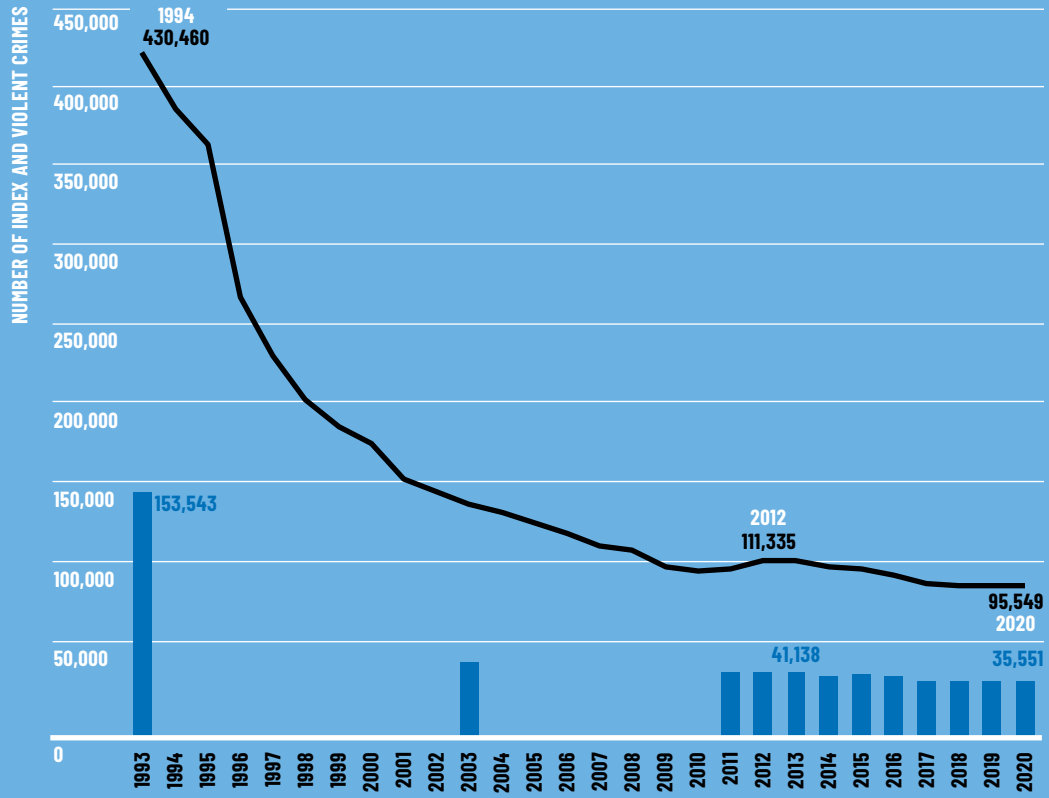
## MAP'S APPROACH TO USING PHYSICAL SPACE AS AN INTENTIONAL CONNECTOR AND MAKING THE STREET AND THE STOOP A COMMUNAL "FRONT YARD" HAS PROVED ANOTHER AVENUE TO CREATING WELLBEING IN A TIME OF STRESS AND TRAUMA

employment to every young person eligible in the MAP developments, and a community-led process to change physical spaces to invite positive interaction among residents and the surrounding neighborhood (New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice 2018c; Pearl 2019).

The connections, networks, and supports that grew up to execute on the solutions developed by NeighborhoodStat have proved adaptable and durable. During the pandemic, these networks have nimbly deployed, providing front line services such as food, personal protective equipment, and wellness checks on the elderly and other vulnerable residents. As the pandemic has confined people to their neighborhoods and blocks, MAP's approach to using physical space as an intentional connector and making the street and the stoop a communal "front yard" has proved another avenue to creating wellbeing in a time of stress and trauma (New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice N.d.).

Results from an independent evaluation show a significant drop in crime and an increase in social cohesion, providing some evidence that MAP can help establish a durable peace when residents have strong ties to one another, access to government resources, a voice in matters of importance, and trust in the fairness of government decisions (Delgado, Moreno, Espinobarros, and Butts 2020).

As the neighborhood structures were strengthening, starting with investments in 2014, the police also offered a change in outlook. Bratton, a savvy politician as well as an experienced police commander, understood the damage that the over-policing of the previous decades had inflicted on communities of color (Bratton 2015). And he understood, as a practical matter, that trust had to be the foundation of any policing strategy he might introduce: without trust, people don't come forward as witnesses, don't serve as jurors, don't vote to convict on the evidence. Under the slogan: "fair for everyone, everywhere," he implemented a "neighborhood policing" strategy deploying an additional 1,600 cops whose job was to walk the beat, interact with residents, and build personal relationships as a way to ensure cooperation from the community (City of New York 2015). Demonstrating the gap between the sentiments expressed in the streets where CMS and MAP operated and the rooms where the mayor and the police commissioner worked, the mayor had this to offer on the announcement: "It will not take long for New Yorkers to realize this is what they've been waiting for. This is what they've been wanting for years" (Russo 2015). It was a several hundred million dollar bet on how to bridge the gap between police and community (Russo 2015). The summer of 2020 showed how very transactional that relationship was.



**FIGURE 6**

**Index Crime in New York City.**

Sources: New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services 2021 and New York City Open Data 2021.

- Index crime
- Violent crime (subset of index)



## **AS 2020 BEGAN, THERE WAS A PALPABLE TURN FROM A POLICE-AND FORCE-CENTRIC MODEL OF SAFETY TOWARDS A MODEL IN WHICH SAFETY IS SECURED THROUGH THE OPPORTUNITIES CIVIL SOCIETY CAN OFFER, GUIDED BY COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS**

As 2020 began, New Yorkers watched crime continue to decline and the operations of the criminal justice system recede from communities of color. The jails held half as many people as 7 years before (see Figure 5), and police arrested half as many people and summonsed and stopped about 90 percent fewer people than in 2013 (see Figure 4). Index and violent crime fell 14 percent and 12 percent respectively between 2013 and 2019 (see Figure 6 and Table 1). It became common for local elected officials to demand CMS sites in their districts when violence ticked up and MAP began to be

noticed as national model (New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice 2017; Pearl 2019). If not yet fully formed, there was a palpable turn from a police-and force-centric model of safety towards a model in which safety is secured through the opportunities civil society can offer, guided by community aspirations.

At the same time, tensions between the police-first and community-first models, though submerged, did not disappear. The police began to chafe under the range of reforms, resentful that their powers were constricted as some "tools" had been taken off the table (CBS New York 2020). When the state passed a bail reform statute to take effect on the first day of January in 2020, the police attacked, with the full force of the pent-up frustration that stemmed from their sense that their power was ebbing (Parascandola and Tracy 2020). These were the sparks of conflict ready to combust in the plague year to come. □

## TABLE 1

Criminal Justice System Percent Changes, 1993–2020.

	<b>Violent crime (subset of index)</b>	<b>Index crime</b>	<b>Homicides</b>	<b>Shooting incidents</b>	<b>Jail population</b>
2020 vs 1993	-77%	-78%	-76%	-71%	-76%
2020 vs 2011 (2011 had similar shooting numbers to 2020)	-12%	-10%	-10%	1%	-64%
2020 vs 2013	-14%	-14%	38%	39%	-61%
2020 vs 2019	-2%	0%	45%	97%	-39%

Sources: New York City Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice 2021b; New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services 2021; and New York City Open Data 2021.

# 2020: A YEAR OF CRISIS

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## **In the second week of March 2020, the “City that Never Sleeps” went quiet. As COVID-19 tore through New York City’s neighborhoods, hitting the city harder than anywhere else in the country, public life shut down.**

New Yorkers retreated into their apartments, commuters and tourists stayed home, restaurants and cafes closed. The wail of ambulance sirens provided the most audible reminder of the virus that had overtaken the city.

The pandemic distilled to its essence every part of city life and every decision of city government, stripping down the choices—literally—to life and death. This was true in the criminal justice system as well: police began to make arrests only for the most serious offenses, prosecutors accepted only those cases worth the scarce available times in court, and courts scaled back to the bare essentials to keep the system running (New York City Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice 2020c). The danger of COVID-19 also prompted a joint effort across multiple agencies within city and state government to reduce the number of people in jail in order to make space for social distancing

and quarantine inside. Within three weeks, the number of people in jail dropped from over 5,400—already the lowest population since 1953—to 3,800, the lowest since 1946 (New York City Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice 2020d).

Even as criminal justice operations slowed, tensions between the police and community members of color began to rise. Deployed across the city to enforce social distancing, aggressive officer behavior began cropping up regularly on mobile phone videos showing casual use of force frequently targeting people of color. In one video, an officer breaking up a gathering at an evening cookout in a predominantly Black neighborhood, punched a man in the face. Another man in the same neighborhood was knocked unconscious, following a dispute between officers and residents over the lockdown guidelines (Southall 2020).<sup>5</sup> In another, officers were shown

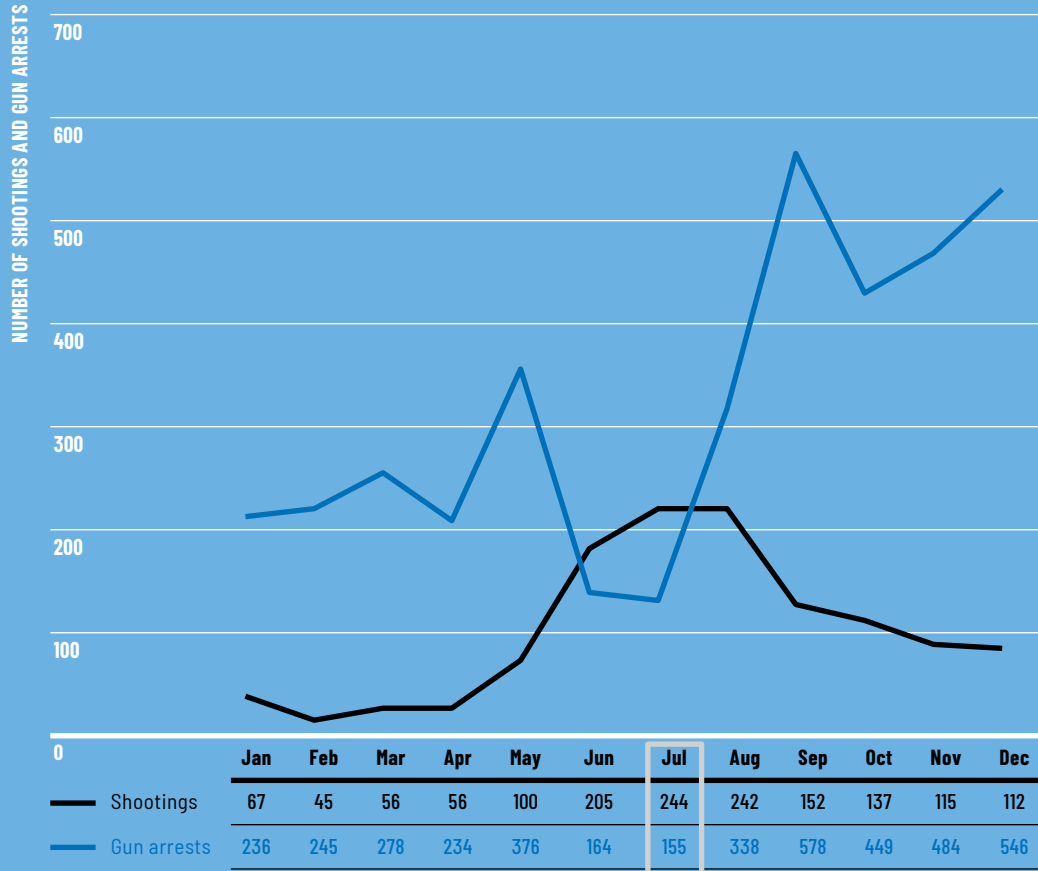
throwing a mother to the ground, cuffing and arresting her while her two-year-old child watched (Abc7 Eyewitness News 2020). The scenes reflected a larger pattern of unequal enforcement: by May 8th, 81 percent of summons for compliance with COVID-19 social distancing protocols had been issued to Black and Latinx people. Advocates and others strengthened their calls for “education not enforcement,” while videos documenting police officers’ lax attitude toward wearing masks themselves further undermined the legitimacy of the NYPD in a time of crisis (Meminger and Gonella 2020).

Already raw with the surfacing of decades-long racial tensions, the video of George Floyd’s brutal death on May 25th ignited the city. Within days, large-scale demonstrations all over the five boroughs called for defunding the police, with scattered scenes of looting and damage to storefronts in parts of the city unused to disruption. The NYPD responded with brute force. The images spread across the news and social media showed police officers in riot gear massed in public places where mostly peaceful protestors gathered, and captured incidents of violence. While some of the violence emanated from protestors, the force used by the NYPD took center stage as videos, streamed out to the world, showed officers slamming demonstrators to the ground, driving straight through crowds on the street, and kettling peaceful protestors into dangerously crowded areas (New York City Department of Investigation 2020).

As the city burst back to life to protest racial injustice and police brutality, gun violence—which had already begun to tick up by mid-May—rose sharply. In the six weeks between June 14th and the end of July, shootings increased by 192 percent over the previous year (New York City Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice 2020e). The rise in violence was not unique to New York. Almost all major cities experienced a rise in gun violence in the summer months of 2020, and violence surged in cities including Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, St. Louis, and Minneapolis (Sharkey 2021).

More research will be needed to help explain the rise of violence in 2020, a year that brought about severe hardship and a year in which Americans’ daily routines were upended. But the rise of violence from the end of May onward is consistent with research showing that violence often rises in the aftermath of high-profile incidents of police violence and the investigations and protests that may follow (Rosenfeld 2016; Devi and Fryer 2020; Rosenfeld and Lopez 2020). Importantly, this work does not mean that protests against police cause violence to rise. Rather, it means that in the aftermath of large-scale protests against police violence, the local social order is disrupted and neighborhoods are destabilized, creating the conditions for violence to emerge.





**FIGURE 7**

**Shootings and Arrests for Gun Violence in 2020.**

Source: New York City Police Department 2021b.

Note: Data compiled from monthly press releases found in above source.



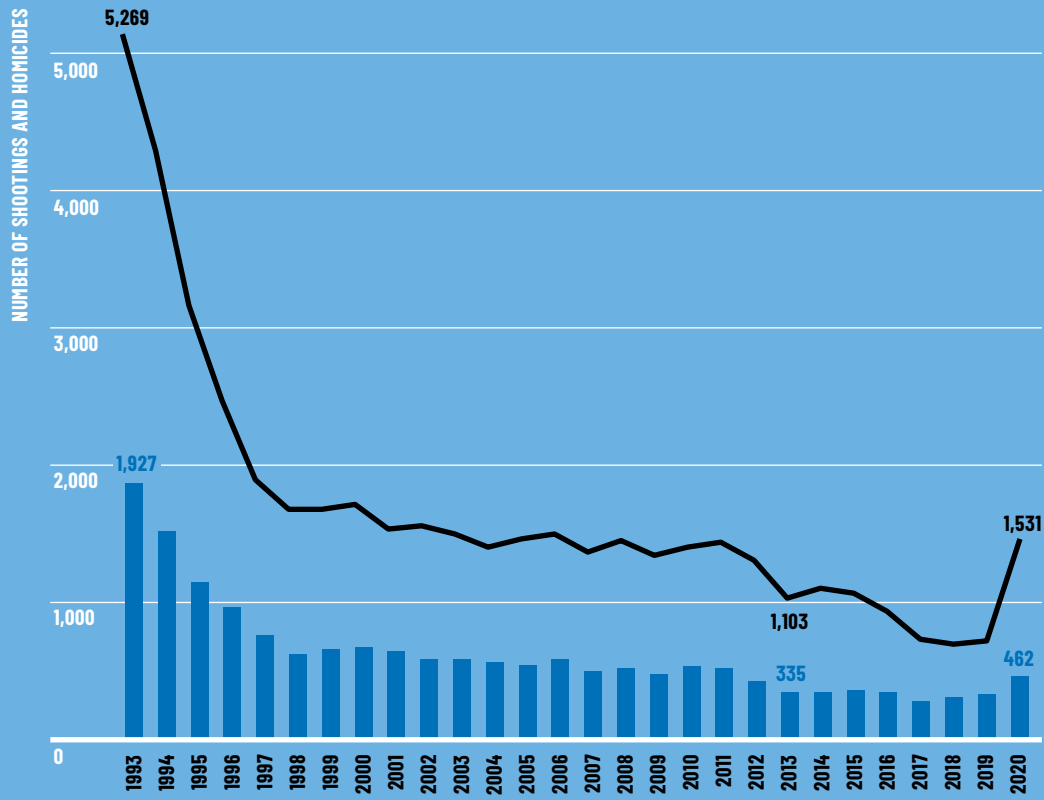
## AT THE SAME TIME THAT NYPD RETREATED FROM PUBLIC SPACES AND SCALED BACK ENFORCEMENT, RESIDENTS BECAME LESS WILLING TO COOPERATE WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT IN INVESTIGATING CRIME

This can happen for multiple reasons. Police, who have been asked to dominate city streets to control violence, often step back and reduce their activity in the aftermath of widespread protests (Devi and Fryer 2020). This took place in New York, as the NYPD pulled back on enforcement, with gun arrests decreasing by 56 percent from May to June even while the number of shootings doubled (see Figure 7).

Residents may also “check out” if they feel like they are not valued members of the city, and may become unwilling to work with city government or the police. Evidence suggests that this, too, happened in New York City. Establishing lines of communication between residents and the police on serious crimes like shootings had always been a challenge, and was one of the NYPD’s motivations for improving community-police relations.

But at the same time that NYPD retreated from public spaces and scaled back enforcement, residents became less willing to cooperate with law enforcement in investigating crime. While the “solve” rate for shootings had hovered at about 50–60 percent the previous year, during the pandemic it sunk to around 20 percent and has risen very modestly in the months since June (Dorn 2021).

The Police Commissioner placed blame for the violence on people released from jail during the pandemic, on bail reform, on the closing of city courts, and on ‘outside agitators’. Each claim was emphatically and conclusively refuted by published facts, further eroding the department’s credibility, even among its staunchest tabloid supporters (McCarthy, Campanile, and Feis 2020; New York City Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice 2021a; Rodriguez, Rempel, and Watkins 2021). By the end of 2020, the statistics for citywide violence were sobering. The number of murders in the city rose by 44 percent compared to 2019, and the number of shootings rose by 97 percent (see Figure 8; Moore 2021).



**FIGURE 8**

**Shootings and Homicides in New York City, 1993–2020.**

Sources: New York City Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice 2021b; New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services 2021; and New York City Police Department 2021c.

— Shooting incidents  
 ■ Homicides

The series of crises that unfolded in New York City throughout the year were not unrelated. Many of the communities hit hardest by COVID-19 were the same neighborhoods that experienced a surge of violence in the summer months (New York City Department of Health 2020; New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice 2020a). The segments of the city's population consistently targeted by the NYPD, most notably Black and Latinx New Yorkers, were the same segments of the population disproportionately hospitalized and dying from COVID-19 (New York City Department of Health 2020). The challenges of 2020 may have been unique to this tragic year, but the patterns of disadvantage are old.

For the past several decades, the most consistent response to the challenges brought about by extreme urban inequality, in New York City and other

major urban centers, has been a policy agenda characterized by disinvestment and punishment, carried out through the institutions of law enforcement and the criminal justice system (Sharkey 2018). This is not to say that there have been no investments made in low-income communities of color, but rather that there has never been a sustained approach to the challenge of urban inequality through a durable policy agenda focused on investment in core community institutions, like schools, families, health clinics, community centers, and social service providers. Instead, New York and most other big cities have invested heavily in the prison system and the police force, and asked these institutions to solve all of the problems that come bundled together when poverty and disadvantage are concentrated in space. In recent years, New York City was gradually moving away from this old model of dealing with urban inequality. But 2020 revealed how superficial, limited, and incomplete the changes in the city's approach have been, and showed that the old model hasn't gone away. □



**THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A SUSTAINED APPROACH TO THE CHALLENGE OF URBAN INEQUALITY THROUGH A DURABLE POLICY AGENDA FOCUSED ON INVESTMENT IN CORE COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS, LIKE SCHOOLS, FAMILIES, HEALTH CLINICS, COMMUNITY CENTERS, AND SOCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS**

# THE OPPORTUNITY AHEAD

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## **The year 2020 brought unfathomable trauma and hardship, and the destruction it wrought has destabilized New York City. But it has also created the opportunity to rethink and reset the city’s approach to challenges like violence and neighborhood stability.**

The pandemic provides a chance to rewrite the book, not just change the font size, on how we secure our safety both because of the structural infirmities and inequities it has made prominent and because of the fiscal crisis it has created.

Our proposal, outlined below, is undergirded by a shift in frame, rooted first in civil society—the combined strengths of the people themselves and the government that serves them—instead of the criminal justice system, however much it may be reformed (Meares 2017). We recognize that there is much to do to ensure that the criminal justice system—at its best, reparative, not toxic—is as effective, fair, and parsimonious as possible. And there is a well-founded and urgent interest in understanding what role the police, as the most prominent face of the state, should play and what can make policing, as with any civic service,

as democratic, respectful, and accountable to the people it serves as possible. Although there is much to do there, our proposal does not address those important questions.

Instead, we focus on how the framework through which we secure our safety should shift away from a primary focus on police and the criminal justice system, and toward a primary focus on the community and government services, of which policing is one piece. This shift is directed toward two intertwined goals: the reduction of violence in New York City and the construction of strong neighborhoods that promote the wellbeing of all New Yorkers. We outline the basic components of what an organized, goal-oriented, community-led civic society might look like and the effects, short – and long-term, not just on safety but also on wellbeing. We then describe a demonstration project to help us achieve these goals.

## SHIFTING THE FRAME: PROVIDING CIVIC SERVICES FOR SAFETY AND WELLBEING

Everyone wants to be safe—from the everyday annoyances of, for example, public urination to the wrecking ball of violence. For decades, our default response to this range of activity has been the police and the criminal justice system. This approach, especially at times of crisis, is appealing because police are easily deployed, readily visible, and give politicians and communities the sense that “something is being done.” They are present 24 hours a day, each day of the week, in every neighborhood and responsive to command, perhaps one reason their tasks have expanded to homeless outreach, mental health response, and vaccinations.

People also want to be safe from government overreach and abuse, most vividly captured in instances of over-policing and even violence by police against the people (Meares 2019; Barker, Baker, and Watkins 2021). Conferring the power to use up to deadly force on the police, even though a necessary power, corrodes the very trust that is essential to the operation of the justice system. Its presence puts up an impermeable wall between cops and residents because it creates an inherent inequality between the two. As one officer said: “We arrest people. How can we expect

them to like us?” It is the central reason why police are the wrong stewards of community centers and the wrong messengers to youth. It should tell us something that this is not the role they play in White, well to do neighborhoods where resources are plentiful and networks supported.

It is not just the presence of force, especially deadly force, that hangs over the relationship between the police and residents. It is also the use and misuse of force that further erodes trust. The events of last summer, as protests against police brutality filled the streets and, ironically, images of police violence regularly appeared in the media, catapulted into the public eye what many have known for a long time: the relationship between residents and police is fragile and fraught. The most concrete expression of this frailty in New York City was the “solve” rate for shootings, perhaps better viewed as a “cooperation” rate, which sank from an already low 50 percent to an even more dismal 23 percent (Dorn 2021). Law enforcement’s crisis of legitimacy is distilled in this shrinking willingness of residents to participate in the justice system.

While police presence does have some deterrent effect, and swift and certain



**THE JUSTICE SYSTEM BY ITS VERY STRUCTURE ADDRESSES HARMS AFTER THEY OCCUR BUT DOES NOT AND CANNOT AIM TO GET ITERATIVELY TO “CRIME ZERO” OR MORE ACCURATELY “WELLBEING INFINITY.” IT HAS BEEN AN ATTRACTIVE DEFAULT BECAUSE IT IS FAMILIAR, DEFINABLE, TANGIBLE, AND OPERATIONAL, EVEN IF IMPERFECT. WE HAVE NOT YET BUILT AN EQUIVALENT IN CIVIL SOCIETY TO THE WELL-DEVELOPED ENFORCEMENT MUSCLE. BUT THE PIECES ARE ALL THERE**

criminal justice response and incapacitation also have an effect on behavior, we need to be mindful of when police presence deters crime and when presence deters cooperation (Nagin 2013a; Nagin 2013b; Sampson and Bartusch 1998). We do not believe that these tools should be abandoned, but that we should steel ourselves to question when and under what circumstances they promote wellbeing and when, instead, they further fuel the cynicism with which many view the state.

There is also another consideration as we weigh how much to use police and the justice system as our first step towards safety. How much will our police-centric approach to safety prevent crime and promote thriving lives? The justice system by its very structure addresses harms after they occur but does not and cannot aim to get iteratively to “crime zero” or more accurately “wellbeing infinity.” It has been an attractive default because it is familiar, definable, tangible, and operational, even if imperfect. We have not yet built an equivalent in civil society to the well-developed enforcement muscle. But the pieces are all there.

The significantly shrinking role that we propose for the police and the criminal justice system as a whole is possible because we

have another, largely untapped, structure that is also present in neighborhoods 24 hours a day, seven days a week. These are the people, families, and community institutions that already play an important role in defusing violence. MAP and CMS are two examples of the more organized efforts (New York City Mayor’s Office to Prevent Gun Violence 2021). But there is a much broader coalition to be organized and built. As we set out in the next section, community institutions—if properly supported—could be the primary bulwark of safety.

Even in the leanest of times, government is a singular, recurring source of funding and distribution of public goods—schools, playgrounds, mental health and homeless services, housing, and physical infrastructure. Led well, government can be the arterial structure of reform, deploying a civic structure as organized and goal-oriented as the police. In partnership with community residents, government can provide as much, if not more, safety as police, without the unavoidable toxicity that comes with force. We outline here the steps to achieve this within government and conclude with how communities, who can and should be authors of their own safety, are the key institutions.



**TABLE 2**

New York City Budget and Work Metrics by Agency, FY14 and FY20.

<b>Expenditures in nominal \$</b>	<b>FY 2014 adopted</b>	<b>FY 20 modified</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>Work metrics</b>	<b>Change</b>
NYPD	\$4,756,863,015	\$6,082,976,755	<b>28%</b>	Arrests	<b>-56%</b>
Civilian Complain Review Board	\$11,916,954	\$19,357,183	<b>62%</b>		
Department of Correction	\$1,065,104,863	\$1,310,387,219	<b>23%</b>	Avg. Daily Population	<b>-49%</b>
Board of Correction	\$939,848	\$2,723,111	<b>190%</b>		
Department of Probation	\$83,304,979	\$121,645,970	<b>46%</b>	Docket Juveniles	<b>-70%</b>
				Docket Adults	<b>-39%</b>
District Attorneys	\$296,160,764	\$465,724,536	<b>57%</b>	Arraignments	<b>-31%</b>
Indigent Defense	\$253,492,418	\$379,438,404	<b>50%</b>	Intakes	<b>Not publicly available</b>
<b>Total-nominal</b>	<b>\$6,467,782,841</b>	<b>\$8,382,253,178</b>	<b>30%</b>		
<b>Adjusted for inflation</b>		<b>\$7,141,800,000</b>	<b>17%</b>		

Sources: New York City Mayor's Office of Management and Budget 2021a; New York City Mayor's Office of Management and Budget 2021b; New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice 2021b; City of New York 2020, and Fox and Koppel 2021.

Notes: \*The agency costs listed here are exclusive of fringe benefits and pension costs which can be as much as almost 100% of the total personnel costs. For example, DOC fringe and benefits, not included in budget above, amount to \$1,073,262, 879. All agency work metrics are by fiscal year, except arraignment which are by calendar year. Budget by agency data come from New York City Office of Management and Budget 2021a and 201b. All work metrics, except 2, come from City of New York 2020. Arrest work metrics come from New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services 2020a. Arraignment work metrics come from New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice 2021b.



## **WE CONTINUE TO FUND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM WITHOUT A RIGOROUS EXAMINATION OF HOW MUCH SAFETY IT PRODUCES WHEN COMPARED TO OTHER APPROACHES. STUCK IN THIS OLD WAY OF THINKING ABOUT SAFETY, THE “PER UNIT” COST OF RUNNING THE JUSTICE AGENCIES HAS MORE THAN DOUBLED AS THE SYSTEM HAS SHRUNK BY HALF**

The current fiscal crisis provides an opportunity to significantly reshape the structures of safety by shrinking the criminal justice system consistent with the reduction in size that has already occurred and commensurate with the additional reductions that should occur as the City further analyzes the appropriateness and cost/benefit of current functions. But more than just cutting back, the fiscal crisis also gives us an opportunity to build the civic structures that will continue to reduce crime. Although New York City is bigger than other American cities, its challenges and opportunities are similar.

Over the last seven years in New York City, the budgets of city-funded justice operations (jails, police, prosecutors, defenders, and probation) rose a little over 17 percent when adjusted for inflation (New York City Mayor’s Office of Management and Budget 2021a and 2021b).

Meanwhile, with the massive shrinkage of the system, justice operations—for example, arrests, arraignments, jail population, and probation caseloads—fell by about half (see Table 2). The misalignment between budget and activity is striking. If the 2013–2014 costs of operating the system were to be applied to the much smaller extent of operations in 2019–2020, the city would realize hundreds

of millions in savings. This assumes that there are no other changes or efficiencies in operations, an assumption that bears scrutiny. There are then resources to be had and better results in safety per dollar spent than we currently achieve by simply building on an old and outdated system.

A closer look, agency by agency, signals an even starker truth: as justice agency budgets have grown each year building on the foundation of the previous year, the way we achieve safety no longer relies as heavily on the criminal justice system as in years past. This is the case even as crime has, for the most part, continued to decline. It is both that we have used arrest and jail less frequently and other approaches more, but also that fewer people are committing crimes. Yet we continue to fund the criminal justice system without a rigorous examination of how much safety it produces when compared to other approaches. Stuck in this old way of thinking about safety, the “per unit” cost of running the justice agencies more than has more than doubled as the system has shrunk by half (see Table 3). While, of course, police, for example, do more than just arrest, this way of looking at the budget is a helpful place to start to understand the orders of magnitude of the issue and to guide the beginning of a sharp look at what police and the criminal justice system should be used for.

## TABLE 3

Cost of NYC Justice Agencies by Unit of Work, FY14 and FY20.

					Cost/Work Metric (constant \$)		
	FY2014	FY2020	change	change%	FY2014	FY2020	change%
NYPD Arrests	396,460	175,809	-220,651	-56%	\$11,998	\$31,335	161%
DOC Population	11,408	5,841	-5,567	-49%	\$93,365	\$203,170	118%
Probation (Adult)	23,805	14,504	-9,301	-39%	\$3,499	\$7,596	117%
DA Arraignments*	174,313	120,045	-54,268	-31%	\$1,699	\$3,513	107%

Sources: New York City Mayor's Office of Management and Budget 2021a; New York City Mayor's Office of Management and Budget 2021b; New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice 2021b; City of New York 2020; and Fox and Koppel 2021.

Notes: The 2020 per unit costs and the percentage increase between FY2014 and FY2020 when not adjusted for inflation are as follows: NYPD Arrests \$34,600 +188%; DOC Population \$224,343 +140%; Probation (Adult) \$8,387 +139%; DA Arraignments \$3,880 +128%. All agency work metrics are by fiscal year, except arraignments which are by calendar year.



## THE NEW MODEL WILL REQUIRE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, GOVERNMENT SCRUTINY, AND RADICAL TRANSPARENCY ABOUT THE FUNCTIONS AND EFFICACY OF NOT JUST POLICE BUT ALSO EVERY PART OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

An assessment of what functions the justice system, including police, should continue to do, what could be eliminated, and what could be transferred to a community structure is a critical exercise. To do this effectively—driven by data showing how to create the most safety for every dollar spent and in partnership with residents who know what makes them safe—will require community engagement, government scrutiny, and radical transparency about the functions and efficacy of not just police but also every part of the justice system. Without a rigorous assessment, it is impossible to answer some key questions that would help light the way: what functions should police perform, what functions do police perform and with what manpower? To what degree does police presence affect crime? How can the jail population be down by half but corrections' costs up by 23 percent? Why are half the arrests that judges arraign (the first appearance after arrest at which a judge decides bail) either dismissed or pled to? What is driving the (long) length of time it takes cases to get from arraignment to sentencing? And none of these questions can be answered unless we agree first on the purpose of the criminal justice system. (Meares and Tyler 2020).

At the same time that city government together with residents rigorously examine the functions and efficacy of the police and the criminal justice system, the government

must organize the multiple resources it has, both inside and outside the bare frame of the criminal justice system, that will significantly increase the safety and wellbeing of New Yorkers. The threshold step, as we describe in the next section, is to identify, hand in hand with communities, what strategies, rooted in evidence and human experience, increase the wellbeing and neighborhood vitality that will in turn increase safety. For example, specific goals should be set for the reach of universal summer youth employment and the connections to continued employment; places which residents currently avoid out of fear could be physically improved and rearranged to increase positive social interaction.

We already fund an array of programs and could fund others that would iteratively shrink the uses of the criminal justice system if we were intentional in the coordinated and disciplined implementation of some of the approaches we know to produce better lives. Just taking one example: suppose the city were to reach approximately double the number of youths currently in summer youth employment, aiming at full enrollment particularly in the neighborhoods most affected by poverty and violence.<sup>6</sup> Reaching this goal would require an approximate doubling of the city's investment of \$134 million to \$236 million. Based on the results from most rigorous evidence in a recent random controlled study conducted



## A TRUE ZERO-BASED RE-EXAMINATION OF THE BUDGET COULD FAIRLY ASSESS HOW MUCH AND AT WHAT COST SAFETY CAN BE ACHIEVED, WEIGHING THE CURRENT OPERATIONS OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM AGAINST A DIFFERENT SET OF INVESTMENTS—SOME STILL IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM BUT TIPPING TOWARD OTHER INVESTMENTS IN THE MODEL WE PROPOSE

in New York City, this expansion would reduce deaths by 18 percent and incarceration of people 19-years-old and older by 54 percent (Gelber, Isen, and Kessler 2016). Using standard costs-benefits analysis calculations on the costs of mortality, incarceration, and, enforcement against the costs of the program, the city would pay \$236 million to support the program but avoid \$492 million in costs.<sup>7</sup>

Now imagine a coordinated set of civic goods, selected based on the best science that we have: what is the impact on the safety and wellbeing of a neighborhood of a combination of road-tested approaches: summer youth employment linked to long-term work, lighting of public spaces, scaled out provision of nurse family partnership to mothers, to name just a few? Most importantly, with respect to long-term effects and fiscal impact, these investments would yield an iteratively shrinking system, as youth who do not touch the criminal justice system in the first place are more likely to never touch the system at all (New York City's Data Analytics Recidivism Tool N.d.).<sup>8</sup>

Budgets are policy. But in New York City, as in most places, they are made incrementally, each year's budget building on the foundation of the previous year, with some additions and subtractions. The massive reduction in the use of the criminal justice system that has occurred over the last few years, as safety

has continued to improve, indicates that there is a different understanding now of how much or little the justice system should be used as the primary tool to secure safety. And the serious fiscal crisis, demands a different approach. A true zero-based re-examination of the budget could fairly assess how much and at what cost safety can be achieved, weighing the current operations of the justice system against a different set of investments—some still in the criminal justice system but tipping toward other investments in the model we propose below.

A disciplined look at how New York City spends its recurring budget will also reveal where it should be invested. Every city has neighborhoods that, for decades, have been centers of concentrated disadvantage. Despite the large reduction in, for example, shootings in those neighborhoods, they remain where violence is concentrated and health, education, and employment outcomes are markedly worse than other neighborhoods (see Table 4). These neighborhoods are overwhelmingly the home to the city's Black and Latinx residents. Focusing and coordinating resources in these few places would have an outsized positive effect on the array of intersecting issues of which these neighborhoods bear the brunt.

## TABLE 4

New York City Neighborhoods with Highest Number of Shootings, 1993, 2019, and 2020.

1993 (precinct)	# of shootings	2019 (precinct)	# of shootings	2020 (precinct)	# of shootings
Brownsville (73rd)	304	East New York (75th)	51	East New York (75th)	102
East New York (75th)	283	Brownsville (73rd)	34	Brownsville (73rd)	96
Bedford Stuyvesant (79th)	241	Morrisania (42nd)	31	Bedford Stuyvesant (79th)	61
Northern Crown Heights (77th)	238	Bedford Stuyvesant (79th)	30	East Flatbush (67th)	60
Bushwick (83rd)	218	East Flatbush (67th)	29	Mott Haven (40th)	55
East Flatbush (67th)	202	Grand Concourse (44th)	29	Northern Crown Heights (77th)	54
Mott Haven (40th)	193	West Bronx (46th)	27	Grand Concourse (44th)	49
Grand Concourse (44th)	165	Jamaica (113rd)	27	Woodlawn (47th)	46
West Bronx (46th)	161	Northern Crown Heights (77th)	25	Morrisania (42nd)	44
Bedford Stuyvesant (81st)	156	Woodlawn (47th)	23	West Bronx (46th)	44

Source: New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice 2020a.



## THE CREATION OF NEIGHBORHOOD CABINETS, ALONG THE LINES OF THE CURRENT “NEIGHBORHOODSTAT,” COULD PROVIDE REGULAR FEEDBACK TO THE ARRAY OF CITY AGENCIES TO ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY AND APPROPRIATE ALIGNMENT OF RESOURCES

None of this will work unless someone with authority is driving the strategy. In New York City, we have deputy mayors to oversee, for example, the housing agencies or the health and human service agencies. But no one with comparable gravitas and knowledge oversees the broad docket of criminal justice agencies. We propose a Deputy Mayor for Justice Policy and Operations who has deep understanding and experience in the justice world. This person would supervise agency operations and resources, analyze and sort the options, and interweave the multiple agency budgets and functions as they relate to safety. Critically, this function must include the day-to-day operational and policy oversight of the police and other criminal justice entities as well as their intersection with other parts of government and the community. Placing police in the context of the larger goal of civic wellbeing and making not just police but criminal justice operations as a whole accountable to a deputy mayor, would provide day-to-day oversight of practices and policies that, at least in New York City, is not currently present.

The enterprise of creating concrete goals for neighborhoods and fusing together resources towards a common goal of wellbeing and safety could be further strengthened by the establishment

of an “Assistant Mayor” for each borough: an individual with direct ties to the mayoralty and the panoramic view of neighborhood conditions and needs. The creation of neighborhood cabinets, along the lines of the current “NeighborhoodStat,” could provide regular feedback to the array of city agencies to ensure accountability and appropriate alignment of resources. The community organization described in the section below would be a critical part of this structure, affording neighborhoods a direct connection to and voice in government decision-making and the distribution of resources, and also ensuring that government is closely attuned to residents.

Backlighting it all, the city government must commit to a radical transparency both in reporting what its agencies are doing and in engaging residents as paid partners to set the priorities. Although residents experience issues first-hand, community problems are also often related to macro-forces (for example, the economy) or are shared across the city. Providing information on a real-time basis about what is driving particular issues—from shootings to homelessness—is a key foundation stone to building solutions and would create a robust feedback loop of ideas and solutions.

## THE NEW YORK DEMONSTRATION PROJECT: A NEW INSTITUTION FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY AND WELLBEING

Restructuring the city budget is one tangible step in the effort to rethink the way cities create strong, safe communities. But it is also crucial to demonstrate that an alternative set of community actors and institutions can, if supported with sufficient resources and public commitment, generate safe neighborhoods that welcome and care for all residents.

grew by a much larger amount (Branas, South, Kondo, Hohl, Bourgois, Wiebe, and MacDonald 2018). This finding comes from a rigorous experiment in which lots were randomly assigned to be “cleaned and greened,” and it aligns with findings from a much larger literature base showing that re-designing vacant buildings and empty lots, cleaning alleyways and overgrown weeds, and improving lighting are all effective ways to reduce violence and improve residents’ perceptions of safety (Chalfin, Hansen, Lerner, and Parker 2021; John Jay College Research Advisory Group on Preventing and Reducing Community Violence 2020). Put in more general terms: when people and institutions care for public spaces, they become vibrant spaces where collective life happens, rather than abandoned spaces where violence is possible.



**THE IDEA THAT RESIDENTS AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS MOST CLOSELY CONNECTED TO AND INVESTED IN THEIR OWN COMMUNITIES CAN EFFECTIVELY CONFRONT VIOLENCE IS SUPPORTED WITH A LARGE BODY OF RIGOROUS EVIDENCE**

The idea that residents and local organizations most closely connected to and invested in their own communities can effectively confront violence is supported with a large body of rigorous evidence. When a local organization led an effort to clean up, redesign, and maintain abandoned lots in Philadelphia, violence fell by 17 percent and residents’ perceptions of safety

Programs run by nonprofit, community-led organizations and city agencies designed to engage young people and provide opportunities after-school and during the summer months rest on a similarly strong foundation of evidence. The “Becoming A Man” program run by a nonprofit in Chicago, for example, randomly selected students





## NEIGHBORHOODS ARE STRONG WHEN SUPPORTED BY A COMMUNITY SAFETY NET WOVEN TOGETHER BY AN INTRICATE NETWORK OF RESIDENTS AND ORGANIZATIONS UNIFIED BY THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE WELLBEING OF EACH RESIDENT AND THE COMMUNITY

and provided an after-school sports program that featured cognitive behavioral therapy, reducing arrests for violent crime by 45-50 percent among participants (Heller, Shah, Guryan, Ludwig, Mullainathan, and Pollack 2017). This program is one of many that has been rigorously evaluated and shown that well-run efforts to reach out to young people and engage them, providing activities during the school year, mentorship, job training, and summer youth employment, can have enormous impacts on violence while also generating long-term improvement in outcomes like academic achievement (Davis and Heller 2020).

Community organizations have also shown a capacity to engage local residents who have been impacted by the criminal justice system, as well as people who are most at risk of becoming victims of violent crime. Interventions designed to provide short-term financial assistance, cognitive behavioral therapy, job training, or social services to people at highest risk of victimization or to those leaving prisons and jails have not been evaluated with the same rigor as the programs described above, but do have a great deal of suggestive evidence indicating that they can be extremely effective in reducing involvement with violence and giving participants the chance to re-integrate into their families and communities (Butts and Delgado 2017; Wallace, Papachristos, Meares, and Fagan 2016).

The individual programs we have identified reflect a more general insight that is intuitive to most Americans, that has been expressed by urban theorists for decades, and yet has rarely been considered in debates about how to reduce violence: streets remain safe, and communities remain strong, when an intricate network of people and institutions are looking out over them, making sure that no dangerous activity is taking place, that no areas are abandoned, that no one is being victimized, that everyone feels welcomed, and that no one falls through the cracks (Jacobs 1961; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997; Sharkey, Torratts-Espinosa, and Takyar 2017). Neighborhoods are strong when supported by a community safety net woven together by an intricate network of residents and organizations unified by their commitment to the wellbeing of each resident and the community.

The second component of our plan is to invest in a new coalition, composed of residents and local community-oriented organizations, that can become the primary institution responsible for public safety and community wellbeing. Building a new institution will take time and planning. We propose a demonstration project implemented through an intensive planning process. The coalition will be led by a single organization, and include other nonprofits, community leaders from religious congregations and schools, residents,



## THE COALITION WILL BE FUNDED WITH A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT AND AT A LEVEL OF RESOURCES THAT REFLECTS THE VALUE IT WILL BRING TO THE COMMUNITY AND TO THE CITY AS A WHOLE

and public and private partners. It will be informed and supported by the expertise of neighborhood residents and by the analysis and research of other key experts who can illuminate the impacts of different investments. It will begin with a planning process to consider the goals and desires of residents, the relationship between the new entity and law enforcement, procedures for different types of events and situations, and the organizational structure. The coalition will be funded with a long-term commitment and at a level of resources that reflects the value it will bring to the community and to the city as a whole.

While shaping the exact contours of the coalition should be the result of an intensive planning process, we anticipate its development as emerging through several steps. A first step would be to select one or a set of communities or precincts where the project will be implemented. It is inevitable that some residents in a neighborhood will oppose these changes, so a plan will have to be developed to determine how to handle public input and opposition. It will be key to select a well-respected leader for the interim planning process who understands the neighborhood and political dynamics and can work with and coordinate both community groups and the analytic teams to determine the shape of the entity that would take charge of the process and outcomes after the planning process.

The planning process would start by funding a planning committee and focus groups of residents and leaders. The goal would be to develop procedures for dealing with incidents and scenarios that have traditionally been handled by the police, including traffic violations, public order violations, all calls for service, criminal investigations, and arrests and prosecution. Additionally, new procedures would be needed to shift the primary responsibility for patrol of the target area and prevention of violence away from police and to the new community institution. Promising models from cities within and outside the U.S. would need to be sought out and studied, along with plans for coordination and communication, hiring and training. The planning committee should be able to hire consultants who can describe and create training guides with best practices for methods of de-escalation, conflict mediation, domestic violence, mental health crises, physical health crises, youth outreach, etc. Procedures for coordinating with public agencies and nonprofits will have to be worked out.

Developing a plan for long-term funding is essential for this to succeed. Funding should be roughly equivalent to the budget for NYPD operations in the area, plus additional funds for planning. A long-term commitment for at least 10 years would have to be in place so that residents can be confident that the institution will not disappear when there are challenges or changes in administrations.

An oversight committee should be formed to gather and voice community feedback about the project, to provide a mechanism for communication of challenges and opportunities, and to collect data to measure progress and satisfaction with the community. This committee might follow the model of NeighborhoodStat, where community leaders and public officials come together to identify and solve challenges or problems within the area along with solutions and action steps.

The operations of this new coalition would be worked out over time, through planning led by those who have been doing this work for years outside the boundaries of law enforcement, and by the community itself. We argue that law enforcement should continue to play a central role in responding to all forms of gun violence, while working with the new coalition to solve problems in locations where shootings are common, and focusing their attention (under the direction of the new coalition) on the tiny fraction of community members who account for a disproportionate share of serious violence. Beyond this role, we envision a community where police officers serve as backup to outreach workers, counselors, mediators, social service providers, unarmed traffic safety agents, and EMTs, becoming involved only if the first responder requests assistance or if there is an arrest to be made (Friedman 2020).

The demonstration project relies on the assumption that most conflicts and altercations can be defused with street outreach workers, violence interrupters, and professionals trained in methods of mediation and de-escalation. Physical and mental health crises can be handled by paramedics and medical professionals, and public order violations can be handled by homeless assistance providers, counselors, and other social service providers. If this assumption seems naïve, we would point out that this is already happening. Data from the National Crime Victimization Survey reveal that roughly half of serious violent victimizations—sexual assaults, robberies, and aggravated assaults—are not reported to the police (Morgan and Truman 2020). The best models of restorative justice lead to the conclusion that prosecution is not always the right response to violence: when given multiple options, a large majority of those who have survived violence do not want the people who harmed them to go to prison; most seek a reckoning, driven by the goals of accountability and healing (Sered 2011; Sered 2019). □

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## CONCLUSION

There are neighborhoods all over the country where residents stopped relying on the police to create safety a long time ago, where local organizations and informal groups have developed their own methods to mediate and de-escalate conflict, to help neighbors experiencing a health crisis, to support those suffering from poverty or addiction, to provide appropriate responses for people with mental illness, and to seek healing and reconciliation in the aftermath of victimization. Local groups, including organizations like Reclaim the Block and Black Visions Collective in Minneapolis, were making the case for new institutions of public safety well before George Floyd

was killed (Hinton 2020).<sup>9</sup> We have models available, but we've never made a sustained commitment to any institution other than the police and the prison system.

If the police are no longer given the task of dominating public space and regulating violence, we have to ensure that someone is looking out over every community and taking responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of everyone within it. If there are fewer warriors on the street, we need to invest in more guardians. The evidence available suggests that community organizations and residents can play this role, but we've never given them the chance. □



**IF THE POLICE ARE NO LONGER GIVEN THE TASK OF DOMINATING PUBLIC SPACE AND REGULATING VIOLENCE, WE HAVE TO ENSURE THAT SOMEONE IS LOOKING OUT OVER EVERY COMMUNITY AND TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SAFETY AND WELLBEING OF EVERYONE WITHIN IT**

## ENDNOTES

**1** In 2019, the total strength of the police department was 51,894, of which 36,643 were uniformed officers (Independent Budget Office 1998; City of New York 2020).

**2** See New York City's Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice 2019.

**3** In 2019, district attorneys declined to prosecute approximately 9 percent of felony and 12 percent of misdemeanor cases. The conviction (with sentence) rate for felonies was 53 percent, and 38 percent for misdemeanors.

**4** The 2013 average daily population for New York City's Department of Corrections was 11,696. On April 30, 2020, the jailed population was 3,824.

**5** See also the social media accounts: Shaun King's Instagram Account, Accessed February 16, 2021 ([www.instagram.com/tv/B\\_ybso8JE9g/?igshid=1tdi9tcp8drhm](http://www.instagram.com/tv/B_ybso8JE9g/?igshid=1tdi9tcp8drhm)); Chivona Renée Newsome's Instagram Account,

Accessed February 16, 2021 ([www.instagram.com/tv/Bv4RAyHdUu/?igshid=1vj2sejf0sfbm](http://www.instagram.com/tv/Bv4RAyHdUu/?igshid=1vj2sejf0sfbm)); Rebecca Kavanagh's Twitter Account, Accessed February 16, 2021 (<https://twitter.com/drrjkavanagh/status/1257883737271959552?s=21>); Josue Pierre's Facebook Page, Accessed February 16, 2021 ([www.facebook.com/100002305537841/posts/2957834360970053/](http://www.facebook.com/100002305537841/posts/2957834360970053/)); Rudy Lo Esquire's Instagram Account, Accessed February 16, 2021 ([www.instagram.com/tv/B\\_zXdKcAWuY/?igshid=n0qosr1idq2c](http://www.instagram.com/tv/B_zXdKcAWuY/?igshid=n0qosr1idq2c)).

**6** The city currently reaches 70,000 young people. Increasing coverage could be shaped in a number of different ways: doubling the investment to reach more people, particularly in the poorest neighborhoods. According to the census, there are approximately 143,000 people in the summer youth employment program age group who are also below the poverty level. The

vast majority of these individuals do not work or worked less than full time year-round. Alternatively, the focus could be on those suffering from extreme poverty (approximately 67,000 people) with a doubling of the length of the program. A third option could be to focus on the group aged 19 or above, a group at highest risk of contact with the justice system.

**7** 2020 update using data from Gelber et al.

**8** Age is one of the biggest risk factors for criminal activity, with young adults being more likely to commit crimes. The number of both arrests and re-arrests went drastically down for young adults ages 16-19 (-69% arrests; -77% rearrests) and 20-24 (-51% arrests; -59% rearrests) from 2009 to 2018, indicating promising reductions in initial criminal justice involvement and recidivism among young adults.

**9** See also [www.reclaimtheblock.org](http://www.reclaimtheblock.org) and [www.blackvisionsmn.org](http://www.blackvisionsmn.org).

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are deeply grateful to Tracey Meares, Melissa Nelson, Vivian Nixon, Robert Rooks, and Vincent Schiraldi for their insightful comments on an earlier draft, to Anamika Dwivedi and Katharine Huffman for working with us closely to edit, refine, and improve the article, and to Evie Lopoo for editorial assistance. Thanks also to Ashley Demyan for her wisdom and insight on the implications of the New York City data and to the team at the NYC Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice for shining a light on the impact of the justice system on the lives of New Yorkers. For their unsparing critiques, animated by their love of New York City and their deep understanding of her streets, justice system, and government, special thanks to Rosalie Genevro, Karen Shaer, and Tony Shorris. To Eric Cumberbatch, Renita Francois, and Jessica Mofield, more thanks than this can express for your vision, leadership, and most of all empathy for the people of New York City, as you forge a new path for safety. Finally, we thank all of the members of the Square One Project for sharpening our thinking and inspiring us over the past three years.

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## AUTHORS' NOTES

Elizabeth Glazer is the former Director of the New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. Previously, Elizabeth served as the Deputy Secretary for Public Safety to New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo and earlier as a federal prosecutor.

Patrick Sharkey is Professor of Sociology and Public Affairs at Princeton University. Patrick was formerly Chair of Sociology at New York University, served as Scientific Director at Crime Lab, New York, and is the founder of [AmericanViolence.org](http://AmericanViolence.org).

## MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE SESSION ON THE FUTURE OF JUSTICE POLICY

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University of Michigan School of Law

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Technology, Criminal Justice and Civil  
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**Bruce Western** | Co-Founder, Square  
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Social Justice, Columbia University

**Danielle Sered** | Executive Director,  
Common Justice

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**Elizabeth Glazer** | Former Director,  
New York City's Mayor's Office  
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Tech University

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Court Judge, 26th Judicial District  
of North Carolina

**Emily Wang** | Professor of Medicine,  
Yale School of Medicine; Director,  
SEICHE Center for Health and  
Justice; & Co-Founder, Transitions  
Clinic Network

**Greisa Martinez Rosas** | Executive  
Director, United We Dream

**Jeremy Travis** | Co-Founder,  
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**Kris Steele** | Executive Director,  
TEEM

**Laurie Garduque** | Director,  
Criminal Justice, John D. and  
Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

**Lynda Zeller** | Senior Fellow  
Behavioral Health, Michigan Health  
Endowment Fund

**Matthew Desmond** | Professor of  
Sociology, Princeton University &  
Founder, The Eviction Lab

**Melissa Nelson** | State Attorney,  
Florida's 4th Judicial Circuit

**Nancy Gertner** | Professor, Harvard  
Law School & Retired Senior Judge,  
United States District Court for the  
District of Massachusetts

**Nneka Jones Tapia** | Managing  
Director of Justice Initiatives,  
Chicago Beyond

**Patrick Sharkey** | Professor of  
Sociology and Public Affairs,  
Princeton University & Founder,  
AmericanViolence.org

**Robert Rooks** | Chief Executive  
Officer, REFORM Alliance  
& Co-Founder of Alliance for Safety  
& Justice

**Sylvia Moir** | Interim Police Chief,  
Napa, CA & Former Chief of Police,  
Tempe, AZ

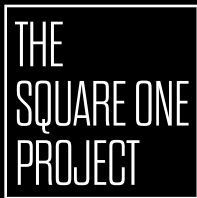
**Thomas Harvey** | Director, Justice  
Project, Advancement Project

**Tracey Meares** | Walton Hale  
Hamilton Professor, Yale Law School  
& Founding Director, The Justice  
Collaboratory

**Vikrant Reddy** | Senior Fellow, Charles  
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School of Social Work & Co-Director,  
Justice Lab, Columbia University

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College and Community Fellowship



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