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# Justice at a Crossroads in New York City:

## Reexamining Crime, Victimization, Enforcement, Incarceration, and Racial Disparities

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### Executive Summary

**The premise of this project is simple: In determining its response to crime and violence, New York City stands at a crossroads.** For several decades up until the 2020s, the City saw dramatic crime reductions take place alongside a [shrinking criminal legal system](#)—represented by fewer arrests, less reliance on jail and prison, and the expansion of alternatives to incarceration. This period culminated in sweeping reforms to New York State’s [bail](#), [discovery](#), and [parole](#) laws that sought to extend the pendulum toward less unnecessary incarceration and greater fairness.

**Recent years, however, have witnessed a series of dislocations and reversals.** A global pandemic disrupted the country’s social and economic fabric, and violent crime increased after years of decline. The 2020 Black Lives Matter protests generated a robust public dialogue about the role of police and the criminal justice system in producing public safety and the need for greater investments in community-based public safety strategies. However, both the reality and perception of rising crime led to increases in low-level enforcement by the New York City Police Department, including more [pedestrian street stops](#), [summonses](#) for [minor misconduct](#), and [misdemeanor arrests](#). At the same time, the City is legally mandated to close the violent and decrepit jails on Rikers Island. This requires further [reductions in the jail population](#), for example by expanding mental health services and speeding up case processing, in addition to improving morale, training and oversight of jail staff and expediting construction of modern, humane replacement jails.

**To provide context for discussions on the best path forward, we sought to ground policy discussions in objective data concerning the City’s trajectory from the 1990s to the present moment.** To this end, we released two reports on the same [project landing page](#). Extending two [earlier analyses](#), one report relied on official data sources to track crime, law enforcement activity, decision-making by courts and prosecutors, incarceration, community supervision, and racial disparities. The second report relied on data from the annually administered National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) to provide trends in both reported and unreported victimization. This executive summary presents key findings from both reports. We believe that understanding New York City’s crime trends, the experiences of crime victims, and the history of the City’s response to crime will shed light on the choices the City faces today.

*We address several questions, with the resulting main themes and findings summarized below.*

### **Victimization: How have victimization rates, the rate at which victims report crimes to the police, perceptions of police, and victim service utilization changed?**

- **Victimization:** Based on data from the [National Crime Victimization Survey \(NCVS\)](#), which includes reported and non-reported crime from people surveyed over three-year rolling averages, nonfatal violence and property crime both declined by over 60% from 1997 to 2008; the trendlines then mainly leveled off, but with discernible increases in the latest years measured (ending in 2021). Mirroring trends for officially reported crimes shown below, recent victimization increases were greater for property than violent crime. *Throughout the period examined, NCVS data pointed to less crime in New York City than other U.S. cities with a population over 1 million, though this gap has narrowed over time.*
- **Victim Reporting Rates and Trust in Police:** From 2005 to 2021, NCVS data indicates that victims choosing to report property crimes to the New York City Police Department (NYPD) declined from nearly 40% to just over 20% (reflecting a gradual drop throughout the period). Over the same timeframe, among victims not reporting property or violent crimes to the NYPD, the percent answering that their reason for non-reporting was that “police wouldn’t help” significantly increased, mirroring similar increases in other cities with a population over 1 million.
- **Victim Services:** NCVS data indicates that among people victimized by serious violence (rape/sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault), use of victim services declined from the late 1990s to 2002 and then gradually rose thereafter—reaching nearly 30% for the first time in 2020 and 2021. In those last two years measured, reported use of services was seven times higher in New York City than other cities with a population over 1 million.

### **Crime: How have rates of officially reported crimes changed since the early 1990s?**

- **Pre-Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Crime Trends:** From 1990 to 2019, the rate of violent “index” crimes reported to the NYPD declined by 77% (including murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault); and the rate of property index crimes declined by 81% (including burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft). A steep crime decline took place in the 1990s and early 2000s, though crime continued to trend modestly downward through 2019. From 2019 to 2023, violent index crimes then ticked upward by 18% (peaking at a higher increase as of 2022 before receding in 2023), while the property index crimes saw a much greater increase of 58%. **Upshot:** *In absolute terms, the seven major crimes plummeted from 711,556 in 1990 to 170,121 in 2019, before landing at 248,203 in 2023.*
- **Shootings:** Shooting incidents followed a similar pattern: plummeting from 5,269 in 1993 to 777 in 2019, nearly doubling to 1,562 in 2021, and then falling considerably to 974 in 2023.

### Law Enforcement: How have enforcement activities by the NYPD changed?

- **Pedestrian Stops:** Pedestrian stops (a.k.a., stop-question-and-frisk) conducted when an officer reports a "reasonable suspicion" of criminal activity plummeted by nearly 99% from 685,724 in 2011 to a low of 8,947 in 2021, before nearly tripling during the Adams administration to 25,386 in 2024.
- **Summonses:** *Criminal summonses* for minor offenses fell by 91% from 490,349 in 2006 to 45,717 in 2021, before more than doubling to 94,542 in 2024. *Civil summonses* involving an online fine in lieu of a court appearance spiked over eightfold from 11,310 in 2021 to 90,354 in 2024, including 50,506 civil summonses alone for carrying alcohol in public.
- **Arrests:** Over the pre-pandemic decade from 2010 to 2020, arrests dropped substantially (especially for low-level misdemeanor charges). Following a further sharp decline in the 2020 pandemic year, arrests generally returned to their pre-pandemic 2019 total by 2023—although arrests for a violent felony grew 29% higher in 2023 compared to 2019.
- **Drug Arrests:** Drug arrests saw especially dramatic declines from their peak years: Felony drug arrests fell by 84% from 48,698 in 1990 to 8,031 in 2023, arrests for misdemeanor drug possession fell by 77% from 41,288 in 2000 to 9,412 in 2023 (-77%), and marijuana possession arrests fell from 51,738 in 2011 to 106 in 2021 to zero in 2023 (post-legalization).

### Courts and Prosecutors: How have prosecutors' decisions of whether to file arrests with the court, judges' bail decisions, conviction rates changed?

- **Misdemeanor Declination Rates:** District Attorneys went from declining to prosecute 8% of misdemeanor arrests in 2017 to 19% in 2023. [Prior research](#) found these rising declinations were concentrated among minor charges, such as fare evasion, trespass, and prostitution.
- **Bail-Setting:** Judges' bail-setting declined well before bail reform took effect in 2020. From 1987 to 2019, bail-setting fell from 28% to 10% for misdemeanors and from 57% to 37% for nonviolent felonies (while rising modestly for violent felonies). By 2023, the rates were 6%, 26%, and 50% for misdemeanors, nonviolent felonies, and violent felonies, respectively.
- **Convictions:** Mitigating [known collateral consequences](#), criminal conviction rates fell sharply from 36% in 1990 to 8% in 2023 for cases initially arrested for a misdemeanor, and fell from 54% to 19% for nonviolent felonies. The change for violent felonies was more modest, with criminal conviction rates declining over from 38% to 30%.

### **Incarceration: How has reliance on jails and prisons shifted?**

- **Incarceration at Sentencing:** From 1990 to 2021, jail sentences for misdemeanors ending in a conviction dwindled from 22% to 4%, before landing at 7% in 2023. State prison sentences for nonviolent felonies fell from 22% in 1990 to 6% in 2021, before landing at 8% in 2023. Prison for violent felonies, by contrast, saw little net change, 1990 to 2023 (32% and 31%).
- **Daily Jail Population:** The City’s daily jail population peaked at 20,419 in 1991, before reaching a low watermark of 3,927 on the average day in 2020—only to climb back to 6,335 in 2024. As of this report’s release in April 2025, the jail population [exceeded 6,800](#).
- **Daily Prison Population:** After reaching 47,582 in 1996, the daily prison population dwindled to 11,314 in 2022, before inching upward to 12,219 in 2024. People imprisoned for drug offenses peaked at 22,266 in 1999, before dropping by 86% to 3,048 in 2024.
- **Alternatives to Incarceration:** From the 1990s to the present, New York City’s alternative to incarceration (ATI) infrastructure ballooned. While available data by no means points to a linear trend (ATI enrollment dropped from 2010 to 2020, alongside overall crime and arrest declines), the peak was the most recent year of 2023, when enrollment exceeded 19,000.

### **Racial Disparities: To what extent have racial and ethnic disparities declined?**

- **Absolute Declines from Peak Years:** Across all metrics and racial/ethnic groups examined, there were absolute declines in criminal legal involvement from earlier peak years to 2023.
- **Racial Disparities:** In relative terms, racial disparity ratios *narrowed* up until 2019 across all metrics for Hispanic people and across all metrics except pedestrian stops for Black people. However, Black-white disparities *increased* from 2019 to 2023 for all metrics except civil and criminal summonses, jail sentences, and daily jail population, with Hispanic-white disparities increasing for all metrics except jail sentences and the daily population. In general, racial disparities in 2023 remained high across all metrics—with the widest disparities found in prison incarceration and pedestrian stops.

[\*\*Click here to read the full reports.\*\*](#)