

US stats show violent crime dramatically falling, so why is there a rising clash with perception?

abc abcnews.go.com/US/us-stats-show-violent-crime-dramatically-falling-rising/story

"I don't believe the statistics," said Auriol Sonia Morris, a Trump supporter.

By [Bill Hutchinson](#)

March 22, 2024, 12:41 PM



1:45

Members of the National Guard patrol a Manhattan subway station on March 18, 2024 in New York City.

Spencer Platt/Getty Images

In his State of the Union address this month, President Joe Biden boasted that the nation reported a historically low murder rate in 2023 and violent crime had plummeted to one of the lowest levels in 50 years.

For some Americans, however, the perception of crime is clashing with the statistics.

"I don't believe it, plain and simple. I don't believe it because we're experiencing different results," Auriol Sonia Morris -- a South Carolina education, finance and legal consultant who describes herself as a Black conservative Republican and a supporter of former President

Donald Trump -- told ABC News.



People flee after shots were fired near the Kansas City Chiefs' Super Bowl LVIII victory parade on February 14, 2024, in Kansas City, Missouri.

Andrew Caballero-reynolds/AFP via Getty Images

Morris, a former Democrat who voted for Bill Clinton in the 1992 presidential election, said she has not noticed a significant decline in crime in her state.

According to a Forbes magazine study released this month on the most dangerous states in America, South Carolina ranks eighth with a crime rate of 4.91 violent crimes per every 1,000 residents. Still, an annual report published in November by the South Carolina State Law Enforcement Division found overall violent crime dropped 2.6% from 2021 to 2022, including a 12% decrease in homicides.

'False sense of security'

"You can always find a statistic for your side. But the average person knows that that is not the case. It's almost like you're lulling the people into a false sense of security when the experience is far different," said Morris, adding that she was compelled to run for Congress as a conservative Republican in 2022 by issues underlying crime in her 6th Congressional district, citing high poverty, a poor education system and lack of employment opportunities.



Auriol Sonia Morris, who describes herself as a Black Republican conservative, says she doesn't believe the statistics that crime is dramatically falling across the nation.

ABC News

For many in America who are victims, crime is a reality more than a perception.

Pierre Augustine, a Brooklyn, New York, resident, told ABC News that his perception of crime is not based on the statistics showing crime in the New York City transit system fell 2.6% in 2023 compared to 2022. In February 2023, the 66-year-old Augustine was waiting for a subway train in Brooklyn's Crown Heights neighborhood when he was randomly pushed onto the tracks allegedly by a homeless stranger police described as a 44-year-old recidivist criminal. Augustine said this week that he still suffers from injuries he sustained in the attack and hasn't taken a subway since.

"I can tell you, crime is going up and up," Augustine said. "Every day you listen to the news, there is a crime in the subway stations."

And while subway crime was down from 2024 to 2023, it actually rose by 46% in January 2024 compared to January 2023, illustrating that overall crime statistics don't always tell the whole story.

The most recent crime numbers lend merit to Augustine's statement. According to the NYPD, crime in the transit system is up roughly 7% in 2024 compared to the same period in 2023 and includes a series of recent violent attacks and shootings that prompted New York Gov. Kathy Hochul to deploy the National Guard to the subway system this month.

For Black Americans nationwide, particularly young men, becoming the victim of violent crime remains disproportionately high.

While Blacks account for 14% of the U.S. population, they comprise 60% of those killed by firearm homicides annually, according to an analysis published in February by the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence. The [study](#), based on data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from 2017 to 2021, showed Black males 18- to 24-years-old are 23 times more likely to die by firearm homicide than their white male peers.

Hate crimes are also rising across the country, according to a report from the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino. The report titled "[Faith Under Fire](#)" and published in January, found that hate crimes across the United States increased 11% in 2023 from 2022, with antisemitic and anti-Muslim hate crimes soaring in the wake of the Israel-Hamas war.

In New York City, antisemitic hate crimes jumped 12.6% and anti-Muslim hate crimes rose 22%. In Los Angeles, antisemitic hate crimes rose 48% in 2023 and anti-Muslim hate crimes climbed 40%, according to the report. Those numbers have continued to rise in the first month of 2024 as the NYPD's Hate Crime Task Force has seen a 12% increase in bias crimes, according to police department statistics.

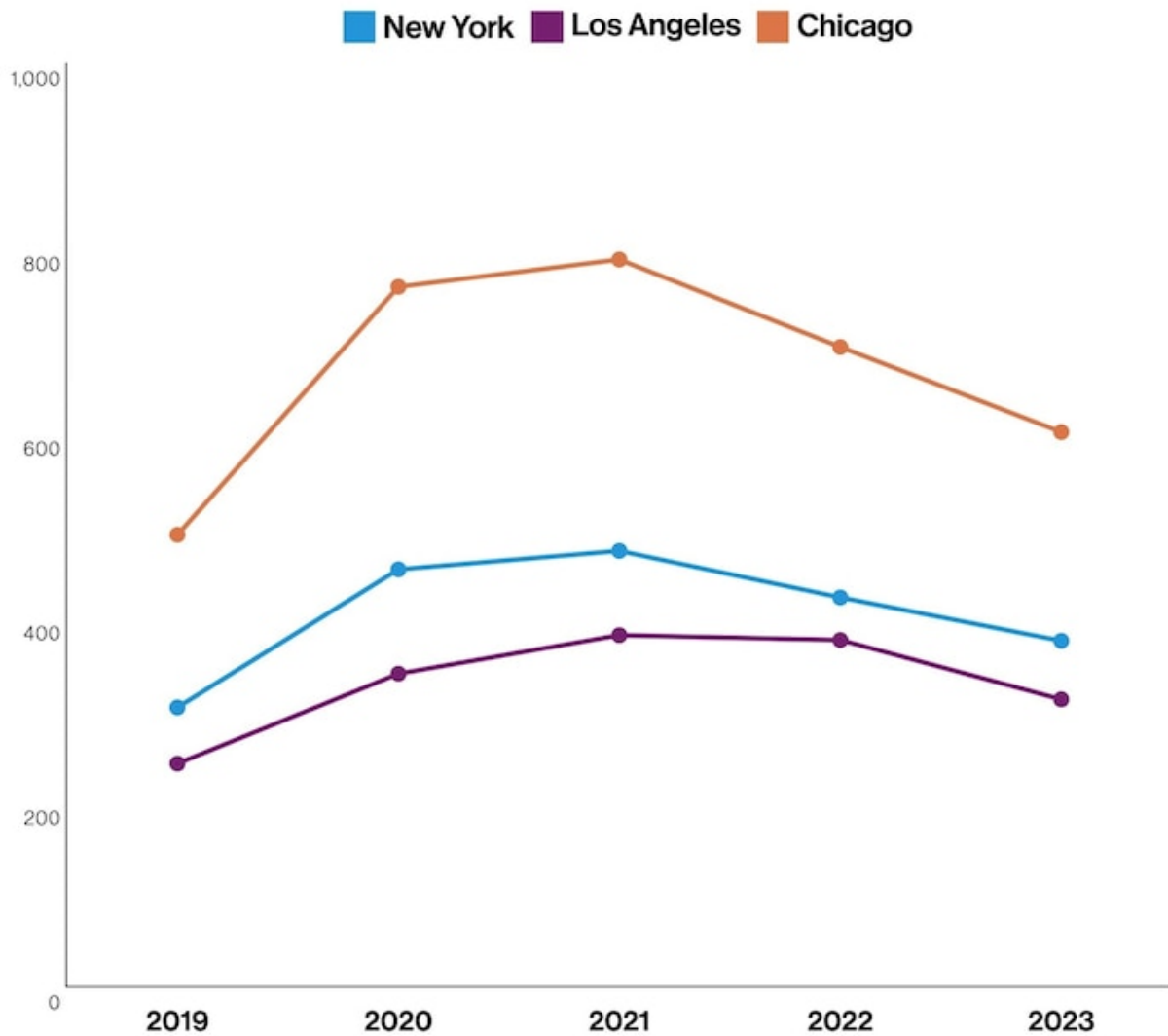
MORE: 'It's just crazy': 12 major cities hit all-time homicide records

→

More than three-quarters of Americans say there is more crime in the U.S. than a year ago and more than half of Americans say the same about crime in their local area, according to a [Gallup poll](#) released in November.

Homicide Stats in 3 Largest US cities

FROM 2019-2023



SOURCE: NYPD, LAPD, CPD



Homicide Stats in 3 Largest US cities
ABC News, NYPD, LAPD, CPD

Howard Lavine, a professor of political psychology at the University of Minnesota, said the perception of crime is skewed by a focus on year-over-year statistics and not by a historical perspective.

"This is a long-term phenomenon. Crime has decreased since the middle of Bill Clinton's first term precipitously," Lavine told ABC News. "It isn't a simple story of linear decline from whenever it started to right now. It was until the pandemic and then it spiked, and now it's on the way back down to that baseline where you would predict if there were no pandemic. But it is one of the very long-term misperceptions that Americans have."

Lavine said many Americans are what he referred to as "pattern association constructors."

"That's how the human mind works. We can be easily led to see things that aren't there when people lead us to co-occurrences that are in fact not only there, but the real co-occurrences are exactly the opposite," Lavine said.

He said that in most presidential elections where there's a Democratic incumbent, the issue of crime is going to be salient "whether it's decreasing as it has been in the last 30 years or it's going to be morphed into some other issue like migration."

"There are issues that the public trusts the Republicans on more than we trust the Democrats. Crime is a prime example," Lavine said.

13% decline in violent crime in 2023

The FBI quarterly uniform crime report published on Tuesday indicates a widespread decrease in violent crime during 2023 compared to the previous year, as well as a 13% decline in homicides relative to 2022.

Biden and Attorney General Merrick Garland highlighted the FBI's report in separate statements, crediting the Department of Justice's violent crime reduction strategy launched in 2021 and the White House's American Rescue Plan, which committed \$15 billion to preventing crime and reducing violence.

"We know that hard-fought progress can easily slip away, and we must remain focused and vigilant," Garland said in a statement.

Violent Crime in 70 Major US Cities

	Homicide	Rape	Robbery	Aggravated Assault
2019	6,486	33,429	124,800	241,280
2020	5,904	21,787	82,824	209,968
2021	6,502	22,192	78,101	220,344
2022	8,695	31,050	105,885	288,162
2023	7,789	28,478	105,800	280,316

Source: Major Cities Chiefs Association

abc NEWS

Violent Crime in 70 Major US Cities
ABC News, Major Cities Chiefs Association

Biden touted the FBI stats as "good news" for Americans.

"Across America, families want the same thing: Freedom to feel safe in their community. To know their kids are secure," Biden said. "My administration is making it a reality."

'Optics outweigh the analytics'

Despite the falling crime numbers, Trump and his supporters are making violent crime a major issue in the 2024 presidential election, conflating it with the migrant crisis at the southern border. They have seized on the slaying of 22-year-old nursing student Laken Hope

Riley, who was attacked and killed while jogging in a park at the University of Georgia on Feb. 22 allegedly by a migrant from Venezuela authorities said illegally entered the country in 2022.



President Joe Biden delivers the State of the Union address in the House Chamber of the US Capitol in Washington, DC, on March 7, 2024.
Saul Loeb/AFP via Getty Images

"She was brutally murdered by one of the millions of illegal border crossers President Biden chose to release into our homeland," Alabama Sen. Katie Britt said in the Republican rebuttal to Biden's State of the Union address. "As a mom, I can't quit thinking about this. I mean, this could have been my daughter."

But a Stanford University study published in July titled "The mythical tie between immigration and crime," found immigrants are 30% less likely to be incarcerated than are U.S.-born white individuals. When expanded to include Black Americans -- whose incarceration rate is estimated to be five times higher than whites -- the likelihood of an immigrant being incarcerated is 60% lower than of people born in the United States, according to the study.

Despite the statistics showing otherwise, Trump has described the surge of migrants crossing the southern border as "poisoning the blood of our country."

"The optics outweigh the analytics right now," Robert Boyce, the retired chief of detectives for the New York Police Department, said of the clashing perspectives on crime.

He said fears that crime is out of control are being fueled by the enormous news media attention paid to recent high-profile incidents: Among them, a Feb. 20 mass shooting at the Kansas City Chiefs Super Bowl victory parade that left one person dead and 22 injured; a March 7 mass shooting at a Philadelphia SEPTA bus stop that left eight teenagers wounded, one critically; and three unrelated Spring Break shootings in an hour on March 17 in Jacksonville Beach, Florida, in which one person was killed and three others were wounded.



Members of the National Guard patrol a Manhattan subway station on March 18, 2024 in New York City. Spencer Platt/Getty Images

"We see these things we think, 'Oh, this is just terrible' and it is, but it kind of belies the issue that crime is down in the last couple of years," Boyce said.

Quest to get back to 2019 numbers

The Major Cities Police Association's Violent Crime Survey found double-digit declines in homicide across nearly 70 of America's largest cities in 2023 compared 2022.

But while cities with traditionally high crime levels like New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago and Philadelphia saw homicides decline by 12% to 21%, other cities saw sharp increases in slayings in 2023 compared to 2022. Homicides went up 24% in Memphis, 27% in

Washington, D.C., 15% in Dallas and 14% in Kansas City.

According to NYPD crime statistics, violent crime in New York City is continuing to fall in 2024. Through March 17, the data show homicides are down 19% from the same period in 2023.

Meanwhile, violent crime in the New York City housing developments fell 3.2% in 2023 from the previous year, according to the NYPD data.

Boyce said while overall crime has fallen substantially in the past two years, it is still higher than it was in 2019 before homicides soared 30% in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic that shut down criminal courts and prompted a reduction in prison and jail populations throughout the country to curb the virus. It was also a time when the George Floyd police custody killing in Minnesota triggered protests and demands to defund police agencies.



Evidence markers are seen following a shooting in Northeast Philadelphia, March 6, 2024.
Joe Lamberti/AP

"We were up 30,000 crimes [in New York City] in 2023 versus 2019. That's substantial," said Boyce.

According to historical data from the Major Cities Chiefs Association, homicides and aggravated assaults nationwide are up 17% and 14% respectively from 2019.

"The drop in crime [between 2022 and 2023] is welcomed by everybody. It should be and the police departments are doing their job across the country," Boyce said. "But the analytics are from last year, not from 2019, where they should be."

Boyce added, "We can do so much better and I think we can. But it doesn't serve anybody with scare tactics that crime is really up. It's not what it was, but it's better than it has been."

Related Topics

[Public Safety 2024](#)