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Crime Is Down in 2025. Trump Doesn't Deserve Credit.

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Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott marks the efforts of community violence intervention (CVI) program Safe Streets to achieve over 365 days without a homicide in the city's Belvedere, Park Heights, and Franklin Square neighborhoods in November 2024.

For the past year, Donald Trump has been saying that “homicides are skyrocketing” and the country is “breaking down” with violence even as the data told a much different story. Now, as crime keeps declining, even Trump is finally changing his tune.

Data and analysis from the FBI, Council on Criminal Justice, and Major Cities Chiefs Association all show that, overall, crime went down significantly in 2024, with violent crime largely returning to pre-pandemic levels. The good news defies expectations: homicide rates in Baltimore, Detroit, and St. Louis declined even beyond pre-pandemic levels to historically low 2014 rates. Now, early data suggests that the crime drop is continuing under Trump’s second term. It is still too early in the year to talk with confidence about crime trends in 2025, but at least one researcher projects that 2025 is on track to follow 2024 in terms of continued declines in homicides and violent crime.

Until recently, the Trump administration avoided talking about progress on safety, using the image of a country under “invasion” and permeated with “lawlessness” to justify a brutal mass detention and deportation agenda along with “law-and-order” policies that will reduce police accountability, increase executions, and lengthen prison sentences.

But on June 5, President Trump spoke at a roundtable with the Fraternal Order of Police and said, “We’ve removed thousands of violent criminal, illegal aliens from our communities as part of the largest deportation effort in American history. And just a few months into office, the national murder rate has plummeted by 28 percent.” Conservative media has pushed this story as well. Just as the White House did with fentanyl seizures, which also began declining before Trump took office, he is trying to claim that the crime decline demonstrates his policies are working. As such, it’s crucial to set the record straight on Trump and crime.

Why Trump isn’t to thank for the crime decline

Despite Trump's claim that "the previous administration allowed lawlessness to permeate our country," the crime decline long predated his second term. After three decades of mostly continuous decline, crime spiked in 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic. But after a narrative of out-of-control crime firmly took hold, especially during the 2022 midterms, crime rates began subsiding rapidly in 2023.

Looking at crime rates across the country and across categories of crime, it is clear that the decline in 2025 is a continuation of a downward trend that began in 2023. Trump's public safety policies do not reflect what we know about public safety. His war on immigrants and funding terminations to evidence-based violence-prevention strategies are both more likely to make the country more dangerous than less. It is also far too early to see any changes from many of the administration's actions related to crime—like its executive order on policing or changes in federal prosecutions.

Who deserves credit for the crime decline

It's difficult to determine why crime rises and falls. Researchers are still debating why crime fell in the 1990s, and they will likely debate the ongoing decline for years to come. So far, analysis suggests that crime likely spiked due to pandemic-driven social instabilities, including school closures and unemployment. This means that the reopening of society following the worst phases of the pandemic and the restoration of normal government and community functions were almost certainly key to crime dropping. But as crime still continues to decline in 2025 far beyond a simple "return to normal," other critical factors are likely at work.

One explanation is greater government investment in community infrastructure, from jobs to streets to treatment programs. This included historic investment in comprehensive safety strategies like community violence intervention (CVI) and alternative crisis response thanks to the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act and the 2022 Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. There has been promising evidence on the effectiveness of such policies on reducing crime for years, but they have never been implemented at such scale.

Boston, a pioneer in CVI, ended 2024 with its lowest murder count since the 1950s. After experiencing the national crime spike in 2020, Boston poured money into CVI and other violence prevention strategies. Mayor Michelle Wu credits the crime decline to coordination between police and community-based organizations like CVI groups, as well as other preventative programs like providing 10,000 summer youth jobs. The city's Plan to End Violence is a whole-of-government approach that involves coordination between public health entities, community groups, law enforcement, and many others—not only responding to violence but also taking factors that drive it.

Boston's success is not an anomaly, with local leaders in cities like Baltimore, Detroit, and St. Louis also crediting jaw-dropping declines in violent crime to violence prevention efforts.

Importantly, even as it may take decades to fully understand the pandemic-era crime spike, we do know what *didn't* drive crime up. Contrary to the claims of many politicians and pundits, research has made clear that the crime increase was not the result of criminal justice reforms like bail reform, police accountability measures, or releasing more people from jail and prison. While rising crime made easy targets of such policies that were already under attack, the pandemic allowed researchers and policymakers to demonstrate how safely such measures can be undertaken.

Why it matters whether Trump gets credit

The question of who or what gets credit for the crime decline will be critical in determining how the country approaches safety moving forward. Just as the country has shifted toward recognizing that safety requires more than police and prisons, it could easily go backwards.

The Trump administration has worked quickly to undo many of the programs and investments that likely helped drive down crime. It has slashed staff and funding for agencies across the government that deliver services proven to reduce crime, like mental health and substance use treatment and affordable housing. Of particular concern are more than \$800 million in cuts to DOJ grant funding, of which more than \$168 million went to community safety and violence prevention, along with looming cuts to Medicaid. The administration has signaled that it is more invested in things like “uplifting the image of the law enforcement profession” than community violence intervention.

And despite the historic pace of the crime decline, not everyone has felt the benefits. Austin, Louisville, and Memphis all ended 2024 with homicides significantly above pre-pandemic levels (though early numbers for 2025 look promising in all three cities). In New York City, while murder is declining and shootings are plummeting, violent crime in 2024 was nearly 30 percent higher than in 2019 (though also trending positively in 2025). And across the country, Black Americans are still reporting higher rates of victimization. Progress is by no means guaranteed, and much work remains to be done.

With a combination of rising crime and a government willing to pump money into evidence-based strategies, the pandemic may have been a once-in-a-generation chance to change how the country envisions safety. The crime decline may very well not survive the Trump administration at all—something that might not bother a president who prefers chaos and has a history of simply insisting that crime stats are false.

In the long term, Trump might prefer to maintain a narrative of disorder, as when he sent the military into Los Angeles. This may not be difficult, given that Americans tend to think crime is rising despite numbers that say otherwise, with perceptions of crime distorted by news coverage, economic-related social disorder, and political rhetoric.

But if Trump successfully takes credit for the crime decline, it will distort and undermine the country's understanding of what creates safety.

How to sustain this historic progress on safety

All this underscores the urgent need to set straight the narrative on crime and safety—early, often, and loudly.

We must remain clear about what actually works to drive down crime and make communities safe. That means fighting to restore grants to lifesaving programs and research and to preserve this funding going forward. It means federal lawmakers defending their bipartisan work to build safer communities. It means local leaders—along with experts, nonprofit leaders, and law enforcement—speaking out on the state of crime and how federal cuts have affected their communities. And it means media scrutinizing any specious claims around crime stats.

When we see success, no matter how modest or local—like a Baltimore neighborhood going a full year with no homicides—we must champion it and continue to collect the data to understand what worked. In the longer term, we must continue to improve our understanding of crime and study the crime decline so that we can continue to benefit from its drivers.

The Trump administration has gone to great lengths to undermine safety and justice, and it must not be allowed to profit from or deride the hard work of so many people to reduce crime and deliver safety.

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