

Joe Biden is correct that violent crime is near a 50-year low

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President Joe Biden speaks at a memorial service to honor fallen law enforcement officers at the U.S. Capitol on May 15, 2024. (AP)



By Louis Jacobson May 28, 2024

If Your Time is short

- The FBI's violent crime rate for 2022, the last year officially available, was 370 violent crimes per 100,000 population. Since 1972, only two years have had a lower violent crime rate: 2014 and 2019.
- Preliminary estimates for 2023 show the violent crime rate continuing to fall. If that is replicated in the final FBI data, 2023 will become the lowest year for the violent crime rate in 50 years.

See the sources for this fact-check

As President Joe Biden runs for reelection, Republicans have argued that he's responsible for high levels of crime. Biden has responded by saying that violent crime has actually fallen on his watch.

In May 15 remarks at a national police memorial service at the U.S. Capitol, Biden told officers and other attendees, "You risk your lives every day for the safety of the people you don't even know. That's why each of you, each and every one of you, is a hero. It's no accident that violent crime is near a record 50-year low."

Official FBI data on crime tends to lag, but available measures show overall violent crime has fallen during Biden's presidency. But is violent crime "near a record 50-year low," as Biden said?

We checked the FBI data and found that he's on target.

The White House did not respond to an inquiry for this article.

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Four types of crime comprise the FBI's definition of violent crime: homicide, rape, robbery and aggravated assault.

Over the past six decades, the FBI's methodology has changed in small ways that make such long-term comparisons apples-to-oranges. Notably, the FBI changed its definition for rape in 2013 to expand the types of physical contact that are considered rape. This means recent data on rape shows more cases, making the overall violent crime rate higher than under the old definition.

To test Biden's claim, we used a set of FBI crime data assembled by Jeff Asher, an analyst for AH Dataalytics. Asher collected the data from 1960 to 2022, using data for the original definition of rape to enable an apples-to-apples comparison across time.

Viewed broadly, the violent crime rate rose through the 1970s and 1980s, peaking in 1991 and falling since, according to his analysis. The rate has had a few upward blips, notably during the coronavirus pandemic, but it remains far lower than it was at its early 1990s peak.

There are two ways to determine which time span to use when analyzing the FBI data. It could cover either the 50 years from 1972 to 2022 (the most recent 50 years available in full-year FBI data) or the 48 years from 1974 to 2022 (using 1974 because it was 50 years from when Biden made the claim).

A note: The FBI changed how police departments report crime to the agency in 2021. Some large police departments, such as New York City and Los Angeles, did not change their reporting processes in time for the 2021 data deadline. Although that creates a larger margin of uncertainty for the FBI's 2021 data, the agency always estimates non-reporting cities' crime levels based on similar jurisdictions that did report. Through these estimates, all cities are reflected in the data. In addition, crime statistics experts told PolitiFact that the FBI's 2021 data tracks other crime data studies that didn't change their methodology that year. The FBI's 2022 data was not affected.

We looked at the FBI data analyzed by Asher for both time spans, and using either one, Biden is right that the 2022 data is "near" a 50-year low.

In 1972, there were 401 violent crimes per 100,000 population; in 1974, there were 461 violent crimes per 100,000 population.

Both of those data points are higher than the 2022 figure of just under 370 violent crimes per 100,000 residents.

2022 would have been the absolute lowest year of the past 50 for violent crime except for two marginal drops below the 2022 level, in 2014 and 2019. (In both of those years, the violent crime rate was 364 per 100,000).

Other types of crime statistics, including the National Crime Victimization Survey, show current levels of violent crime far lower than their peaks in the early 1990s.

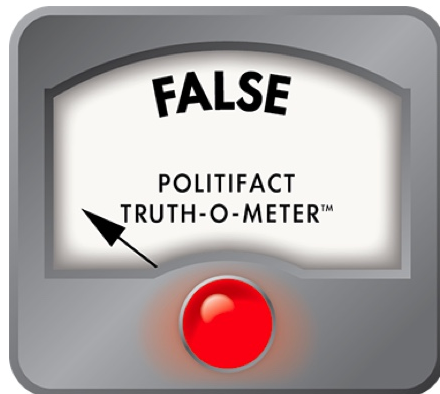
Featured Fact-check



Donald Trump
stated on August 11, 2025 in a speech

Washington, D.C., has 41 homicides per 100,000 people, "No. 1 that we can find anywhere in the world."

true



If the preliminary decline seen in the 2023 private-sector estimate holds up with the full-year FBI data, Asher said, then the 2023 FBI figure would sink to the lowest level of the past 50 years.

"A decline in violent crime of pretty much any magnitude would lead 2023's rate to be lower than 2014's and 2019's," Asher said.

But Biden's statement couched it as "near" the 50-year low, which is accurate.

"Biden's statement about violent crime is absolutely true," Northeastern University criminologist James Alan Fox said. "Despite a spike in murder in 2020 amidst the emergence of COVID, even homicides have declined."

Our ruling

Biden said, "Violent crime is near a record 50-year low."

The FBI's violent crime rate for 2022, the last year officially available, was 370 per 100,000 population. Since 1972, only two years have had a lower violent crime rate: 2014 and 2019.

Preliminary estimates for 2023 show the violent crime rate continuing to fall. And if that replicates in the final FBI data, 2023 will become the lowest year for the violent crime rate in 50 years outright.

We rate the statement True.

EDITOR'S NOTE, June 4, 2024: This article has been updated to note that several of the largest cities in the U.S. missed an FBI deadline to report 2021 crime data. When that happens, the FBI uses estimates to fill in the gaps. Multiple crime experts told PolitiFact that this process does not undercut the validity of the data. PolitiFact's ruling remains unchanged.

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Our Sources

Joe Biden, remarks at a national police memorial service, May 15, 2024

Council on Criminal Justice, "Crime trends in U.S. cities: year-End 2023 ipdate," January 2024

Council on Criminal Justice, "The footprint: tracking the size of America's criminal justice system," February 2024

National Crime Victimization Survey, dashboard, accessed May 24, 2024

PolitiFact, "No, crime has not 'skyrocketed' under Joe Biden, as Rep. Nancy Mace claimed," April 3, 2024

Email interview with Jenifer Warren, director of media relations at the Council on Criminal Justice May 21, 2024

Email interview with Jeff Asher, an analyst with AH Datalytics, May 21, 2024

Email interview with Candace S. McCoy, professor emerita at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, May 25, 2024

Email interview with James Alan Fox, Northeastern University criminologist, May 24, 2024

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JD Vance

stated on August 24, 2025 in an interview on NBC's "Meet the Press":

"If you go back to World War II, if you go back to World War I, if you go back to every major conflict in human history, they all end with some kind of negotiation."

