

Trump Defunds Effective Crime-Prevention Policies

Misguided budget cuts could reverse encouraging crime trends.



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News editors often say, "If it bleeds, it leads." This is a different kind of story, one about an encouraging trend — and the misguided policies that now threaten to upend it.

Starting in the 1990s, **crime rates** [link-3] in the United States plummeted for three decades. A growing sense of safety created the conditions for reforms to the

criminal justice system. What was once a wedge issue dividing voters became a bipartisan cause. Donald Trump signed the **First Step Act** [link-4] during his first term, which reduced unnecessarily long federal sentences and improved conditions in federal prisons. A generation of law enforcement and public officials affirmed: Public safety and fairness go hand in hand.

Then in 2020, things lurched in the wrong direction. Violence soared and property crime spiked. Public disorder spread. Inflammatory politicians and cable news hosts portrayed cities racked with violence

and consumed by fear, stirring racial resentments.

Now, though, there is good news to report — really good news.

Over the past three years, **crime rates fell** [\[link-5\]](#) just as sharply as they had risen.

The statistics are truly striking. In April, under the leadership of Gov. Wes Moore and Mayor Brandon Scott, Baltimore recorded the lowest number of monthly homicides in history, a 62 percent drop from the year before. That trend persists in other big cities. Over the first six months of 2025, Chicago saw its steepest drop in homicides in a decade. New York City recorded the fewest shootings of any first quarter since 1994, when it first started recording statistics.

What caused the crime wave of 2020, and what caused it to recede?

Some blamed bail reform, which reduced or eliminated cash bail in cities across the country in order to make the system fairer. Just yesterday, Trump posted, “Crime in American Cities started to significantly rise when they went to CASHLESS BAIL. The WORST criminals are flooding our streets and endangering even our great law enforcement officers.”

In reality, in the **largest study of its kind** [\[link-6\]](#), the Brennan Center found that

there is no statistically significant relationship between bail reform and crime rates. Crime rose and fell in cities with bail reform as well as in cities that did nothing.

Another myth is that immigrants caused the crime surge. There is no evidence to support that either. In fact, immigrants commit crime at **lower rates** [\[link-7\]](#) than native-born Americans. We can now see more clearly what actually happened. It turns out that, among various causes, the Covid-19 pandemic, economic uncertainty, a disruption to nonprofits and government programs that serve disadvantaged communities, and an increase in gun availability likely played central roles in crime rising. As the pandemic receded, so did violence.

It is also the case that creative policy made a big difference.

According to **The Washington Post** [\[link-8\]](#), Baltimore’s success story was a result of nontraditional solutions. City and state leaders have touted community support systems, gun violence reduction programs, youth engagement initiatives, and increased funding for law enforcement. An “all-of-the-above approach to public safety,” Moore **calls it** [\[link-9\]](#).

The federal government helped enormously. DC funded innovative programs that support local law enforcement, com-

bat violent crime, provide victims with resources, and more. Under the Biden administration, Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act — which included funds intended to combat the pandemic-era jump in violent crime — and the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act — which directed \$250 million toward community-based violence prevention.

Enter Donald Trump for his Oval Office encore. He has slashed funds for the very programs that are working to restore public order. In April, the Department of Justice canceled \$820 million in grants supporting more than 550 organizations across the country directed at reducing crime and promoting public safety.

In a new [analysis](#) [\[link-10\]](#), my colleagues Nicole Ndumele and Ames Grawert detail the striking scope of these cuts. For example, the administration cut \$13 million from a program that directly funded law enforcement in rural communities and has been used to investigate sexual assault charges and curb child abuse. It cut \$3.5 million from a program that brought to-

gether law enforcement officials, community leaders, and researchers to address violent crime — a program that Trump himself deemed a success in his first term.

The DOJ also cut funds from programs that have developed novel approaches to violence prevention that are both effective and humane. It cut \$169 million from community-based programs that fund promising new ways to reduce violence by relying on community leaders to de-escalate conflicts before they become violent.

At the same time, Trump continues to blare that crime is rampant and immigrants are to blame. As he defunds violence prevention programs that work, he is pouring resources into a drive to detain and deport immigrants — who, again, statistically commit little of the violence people fear.

These policies literally defund the police — along with proven public safety programs — while they fund Alligator Alcatraz. Demagogic words, self-defeating policies. It's a bad combination.

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link-3: crime rates <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/us-crime-rates-and-trends-analysis-fbi-crime-statistics>

link-4: First Step Act <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/what-first-step-act-and-whats-happening-it>

link-5: crime rates fell <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/fbi-data-confirms-drop-most-crimes-2023-especially-murders>

link-6: largest study of its kind <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/bail-reform-and-public-safety>

link-7: lower rates <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/debunking-myth-migrant-crime-wave>

link-8: The Washington Post <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-vb/2025/07/04/baltimore-gun-violence-homicides/>

link-9: calls it <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-vb/2025/07/04/baltimore-gun-violence-homicides/>

link-10: analysis <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/crime-prevention-efforts-face-setbacks-after-federal-cuts>

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