

# 'Migrant Crime Wave' Not Supported by Data, Despite High-Profile Cases

Several well-publicized acts of violence by migrants in New York have unsettled some city leaders, but police statistics do not point toward a surge in crime.

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In the past month, the New York Police Department has described alarming crimes involving young men living in the city's migrant shelters.

A 15-year-old boy, the police said, shot at an officer in Times Square and hit a tourist. Two officers were kicked and punched on West 42nd Street. A Venezuelan man oversaw a ring of criminals who rode mopeds and snatched purses and cellphones from more than 60 people, most of them women walking alone.

During an early-morning police raid last week in the Bronx, Mayor Eric Adams, dressed in a bulletproof vest over a Fendi scarf, joined officers as they arrested five people accused of perpetrating the robbery spree. "A migrant crime wave is washing over our city," Police Commissioner Edward Caban told reporters hours later.

Some of the crimes were captured on videos that have since gone viral, leading Republican politicians and their allies to say that migrant criminals are besieging New York.

Quantifying crimes committed by migrants is nearly impossible, because the police are not allowed to ask about a suspect's immigration status, said Kenneth Corey, a former chief of the department who retired in 2022. But police data indicate that there has been no surge in crime since April 2022, when Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas started sending buses of migrants to New York to protest the federal government's border policy.

More than 170,000 migrants have arrived in the city since then, and it is difficult to know what crime statistics would show had they not come. But as the migrant numbers have increased, the overall crime rate has stayed flat. And, in fact, many major categories of crime — including rape, murder and shootings — have decreased, according to an analysis of the New York Police Department's month-by-month statistics since April 2022.

The monthly number of robberies since migrants began arriving in large numbers has fluctuated. It peaked at 1,730 in July 2022, hit a low of 1,155 in February 2023 and climbed to 1,417 last month.

Grand larcenies have also gone up and down, but the monthly total stood at 4,056 in January, compared with a high of 4,687 in August 2022.

Jeffrey Butts, director of the Research and Evaluation Center at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, said that there was no discernible migrant crime wave.

"I would interpret a 'wave' to mean something significant, meaningful and a departure from the norm," he said. "So far, what we have are individual incidents of crime."

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Still, immigrants staying in shelters said they had felt a sense of hostility in recent weeks. On subway cars, they said, people slide over to avoid sitting too close to them or make rude comments under their breath.

“They say things in English you don’t understand, but you can tell it’s bad,” Ezequiel Velásquez, a 22-year-old Venezuelan, said in Spanish outside the Row NYC hotel in Times Square, where a migrant shelter has been established.

Because of the recent crimes, he said, people see all migrants the same way: “violent.”



Immigrants staying in shelters, like this one at the Row NYC hotel in Times Square, said they had felt a sense of hostility in recent weeks. Juan Arredondo for The New York Times

Days after the officers were assaulted in Times Square, a man stood in front of the Row NYC and yelled slurs, said Marcela López, a 38-year-old migrant from Colombia. She could not understand him, but her 11-year-old son translated.

“Immigrant bastard,” the man had said.

The police did not provide statistics to back up Commissioner Caban’s claim of a migrant crime wave and referred questions to a Feb. 5 news conference during which police officials announced the Bronx raid and listed a litany of other crimes likely committed by migrants. Officials at the news conference described a rise in robberies by men on mopeds — a source of transport and employment for many newcomers — since migrants had started to arrive. They also mentioned calls related to domestic violence at shelters, picked pockets, shoplifting and reports of human trafficking.

Joseph Kenny, the chief of detectives, said that mopeds were used in 32 different robbery patterns in the first five weeks of the year (a “pattern” refers to several similar crimes committed by one person or a group of people). Last year, there was only one such pattern in the same time period, he said.

The police said they have also been investigating groups of Venezuelan immigrants who they say are engaged in more sophisticated thefts, like hacking into stolen phones and using people’s identification to clear out their bank accounts.

It is not surprising that among a sudden influx of tens of thousands of people, there would be criminals or criminal behavior, said James Essig, a former chief of detectives for the department.

“Any group that comes in, where you’ve got unemployed, young males hanging out in the corners, they’re going to get themselves into trouble,” he said.

Mr. Corey, the former department chief, said that even a tiny percentage of immigrants engaged in criminal behavior could cause a surge in crime and lower people’s sense of security.

“The bigger question is why would we allow people who are clearly engaged in criminal activity — and we’re not talking about a young mother who is shoplifting baby formula to feed her baby — why would we allow them to remain here?” Mr. Corey said.

Some lawmakers have called for repealing a city law that forbids police officers from honoring detention requests issued by immigration authorities without a warrant from a federal judge.

When describing crimes by migrants, officials have largely stuck to anecdotes and videos that have been well publicized. At the February news conference, officials showed a woman being dragged by a thief on a moped. After the assault late last month on two police officers in Times Square, the department released a short clip of the attack, which led to the indictment of about half a dozen men. The story quickly became a staple on Fox News.

Alvin Bragg, the Manhattan district attorney, later released longer footage of the assault, which showed that the officers had initiated the encounter, aggressively ordering the men to keep walking before pulling one of them to the side after he appeared to yell an insult at the police. The fracas began after the man resisted.

The focus on particular crimes has created a false sense of chaos and insecurity that threatens law-abiding immigrants, said Ana María Archila, a co-director of the Working Families Party, which is allied with labor unions and community organizations. She noted the Feb. 6 assault by the Guardian Angels of a man the anti-crime group had mistaken for a Venezuelan immigrant. The attack took place just as the group’s leader, Curtis Sliwa, was being interviewed live on Fox News nearby.

“You look at the history of immigration, and you see very clearly that waves of migration are accompanied by diminishing rates of crime,” Ms. Archila said. “It’s also true that waves of migration have been received with racist, xenophobic rhetoric.”

In 2023, researchers at Stanford University found that immigrants were imprisoned at lower rates than people born in the United States. In 2020, a Princeton University study noted that undocumented immigrants in Texas tended to have fewer felony arrests than legal residents.

Mayor Adams, who in September said that the migrant crisis would “destroy New York City,” has somewhat softened his tone.

“Any New Yorker that looks at those who are trying to fulfill their next step on the American dream as being criminals, that is wrong,” he told reporters the day of the Bronx raid. “That is not what we’re seeing.”

On Monday, the city announced an 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew for migrant shelters. The decision was described as an effort to bring policies at migrant shelters in line with those of traditional homeless shelters, where curfews have existed for years, said Kayla Mamelak, a spokeswoman for Mr. Adams.

“This policy will allow for more efficient capacity management,” she said.

Ms. Mamelak said the curfew had nothing to do with the spate of crimes.

On Monday in Manhattan’s East Village, a line of migrants waited outside St. Brigid School, a former Catholic school, where city workers were handing out temporary housing assignments.

The scene was serene. Groups of men talked on benches, their suitcases close at hand, or played soccer in nearby Tompkins Square Park. One man used electric clippers to give haircuts to migrants waiting in line.

Josè Rodriguez, 32, who emigrated from Caracas, Venezuela, to New York 10 months ago, said he had waited outside St. Brigid for three days to try to get a housing assignment.

Shortly after he arrived in the city, his moped was stolen in the Bronx. He reported the crime to the police but they were unable to find it.

Still, he said he felt safer in New York than he ever did in Venezuela, where he was arrested for expressing anti-government opinions. When he heard about the shooting by the 15-year-old in Times Square, he felt dread.

“That’s terrible for us,” he said. “Most of us are coming here for a good life.”

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