



A Brief Review of the Current Public Safety Homicide Crisis in Major US Cities

by Giovanni Pisapia

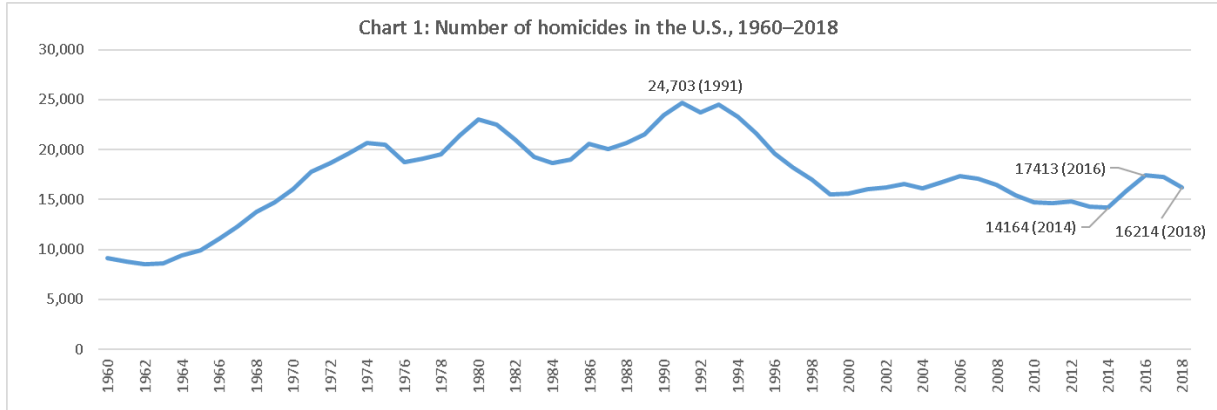
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Introduction

Some major US cities have recorded staggering increases in homicides in the first six months of 2020, if compared with the same period in 2019. As illustrated in Table 1 below, some increases range from 25% (Philadelphia) to 85% (Minneapolis). This trend is bringing to light a public safety crisis, revealed by a long-term increase in the number of gang-related recorded shootings and reduction of proactive-policing. This has been exacerbated by two further major issues: the recent social and economic impact of the Covid-19-related lockdown and a surge of public protests against police in the U.S in response to widely publicized deadly encounters between the police and African-Americans and the subsequent protests, mostly peaceful but occasionally violent, in U.S. cities. This public safety crisis requires further interrogation and additional disaggregated data analysis if the crisis is to be understood and confronted decisively and effectively.

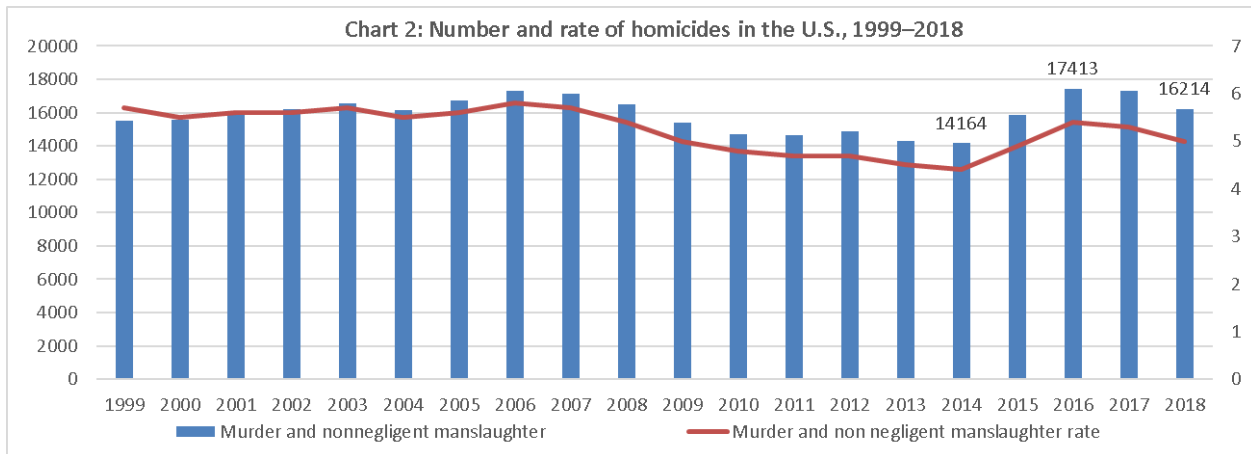
Long-Term Homicides Trend in the U.S.

In general, the total number of homicides in the USA has been declining in the last years. As illustrated in Chart 1, homicide numbers have been waning since the early 90's, with the lowest number of homicides since the 60's recorded in 2014, when 14,610 murders were documented in the United States (Smith E. L. and Cooper A., 2013). Analysis however, show that homicide numbers increased in 2015 and 2016 (Puzzanchera, C., Chamberlin, G., and Kang, W., 2018), with subsequent decreases in the years that follow, 2017 and 2018. FBI UCR 2019 preliminary data show a reduction of -3.9 for homicides in the U.S. in the first months of the year in comparison to the same period in 2018 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.).



Sources: *Puzzanchera, C., Chamberlin, G., and Kang, W., 2018 and Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.*

However, as illustrated in Chart 2, the homicide rate reached its lowest number in 2014, with 4.4 murders per 100,000 of the population. In 2018, the rate reached 5 per 100,000 of the population, with 16,214 homicides total. Homicide data tells us that, for the incidents where supplemental information is available, most of the victims (77.3%) were males, while 87.7% of offenders were male. It is of interest to note, to understand the current surge of murders in the first months of 2020 in some major US cities, that more than 72 percent of the homicides, for which the FBI received weapons data in 2018, involved the use of a firearm. Handguns comprised 64.3 percent of the firearms used in murder and non-negligent manslaughter incidents in 2018. It is also relevant to highlight that, when circumstance data was available, 39.4% of victims were murdered during arguments. Felony-type murders (i.e., murders that occurred in conjunction with the commission of another felony crime such as rape, robbery, burglary, etc.) accounted for 24.5% of homicides for which circumstances were known (Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.). In 2017 and 2018, homicide rates decreased in general in the US. FBI preliminary data states a further decrease in the total number of homicides in 2019 (-3.9 percentage change) (Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.).



Source: *Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.*

2020/2019 Homicide Spike in U.S. Major Cities

It is thus of concern that the recorded spike in homicides in various major cities in the first months of 2020, if compared with the same period in 2019. According to local law enforcement departments’ statistical data, as detailed in Table 1 below, a sharp increase of murders has been recorded in Philadelphia, PA (+26%, 65 more homicides than the same timeframe last year) (Philadelphia Police Department, n.d.), New York City (+29%, 51 more incidents) (New York Police Department, n.d.), Memphis, TN (+50%, with 159 homicides in 2020) (Gurman S., 2020), Chicago (+ 52%, 149 more homicides) and Minneapolis, MN (+86%, 18 more murders) (Minneapolis Police Department, n.d.). This is not an exhaustive list of homicide numbers in US cities. However, it points to a disturbing trend that has come to light in particular in the last few months to U.S. Justice Department and many Local Police Departments (Ailworth, E. and Gurman, S. 2020).

Police Department	Start Date	End Date	2020 Data	2019 Data (similar timefr.)	2018 Data (similar timefr.)	2017 Data (similar timefr.)	2016 Data (similar timefr.)	2015 Data (similar timefr.)	Year to Date % Change 2020/2019
Philadelphia, PA	1/1/2020	8/3/2020	257	192	180	192	165	154	26%
New York City, NY	1/1/2020	7/26/2020	227	176	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	29%
San Antonio, TX	1/1/2020	6/30/2020	71	53	58	61	69	51	33%
Fort Worth, TX	1/1/2020	6/30/2020	46	33	17	22	13	N/A	40%
Chicago, IL	1/1/2020	7/27/2020	433	284	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	52%
Greensboro, NC	1/1/2020	7/26/2020	32	21	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	52%
Austin, TX	1/1/2020	6/30/2020	23	14	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	64%
Omaha, NE	1/1/2020	6/30/2020	17	9	14	15	12	27	89%
Minneapolis, MN	1/1/2020	7/31/2020	39	21	20	24	19	29	86%

Sources: U.S. local law enforcement data sources. Please refer to reference section for details.

To highlight the seriousness of the situation, we should compare the number of murders in the first months of 2020 with the incidents that occurred in the entire 2019: in NYC, the number of murders recorded in the first months of 2020 have been 227 (as of 07/26/2020), while the total number of homicides recorded in the entire 2018 was 295 (City of New York Police Department, n.d.).

The increase has not only touched bigger metropolis in the US. Also other cities, generally with low level of violence, have been impacted by the surge in homicides. Fort Worth, TX and Greensboro, NC have both recorded an increase of approximately 50% in homicides between the first months of 2020 and 2019. Similar situation has been recorded in Austin, TX (+64%) and

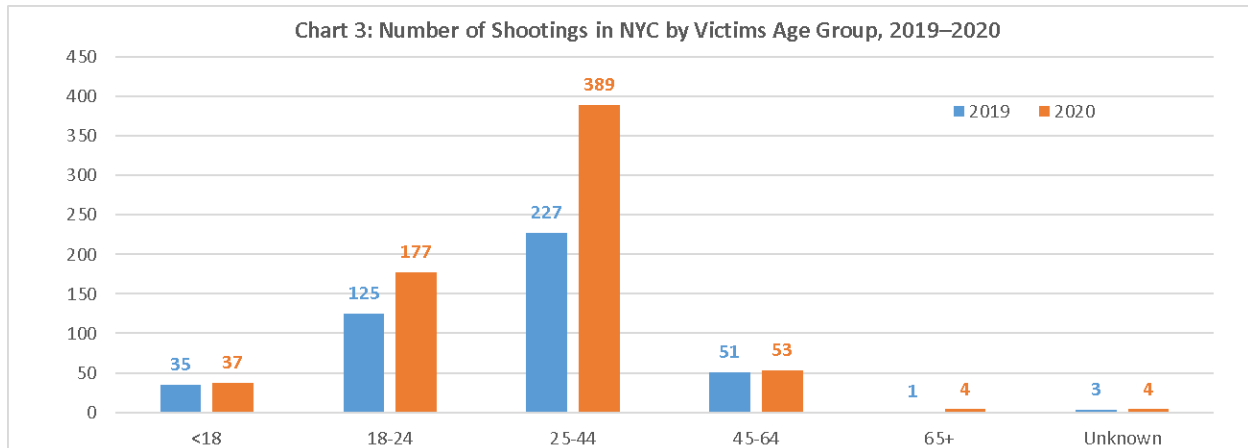
Omaha, NE (+89%). In Greensboro, NC in 2020 (as of 07/26/2020) 32 homicides were recorded, almost as the total incidents recorded in 2018 (34).

Gun-Related Violence in U.S. Major Cities

Connected to the increases in homicides in many US cities is the spike of recorded gun violence, which has been rising steadily in the last few years but received a dramatic push in the last few months. As per the FBI NIBRS manual, gun-related incidents can be divided into two broad crime categories: violent crimes, such as robbery or aggravated assault when a firearm was present during the incident, and weapon law violations. In the former category, gun-related offenses include charges such as discharging firearm into occupied dwelling/vehicle and assault with a deadly weapon (firearm) with Intent to kill inflicting serious injury (ADWIKISI). The latter category includes, among other offenses, the unlawful use of firearms (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2020).

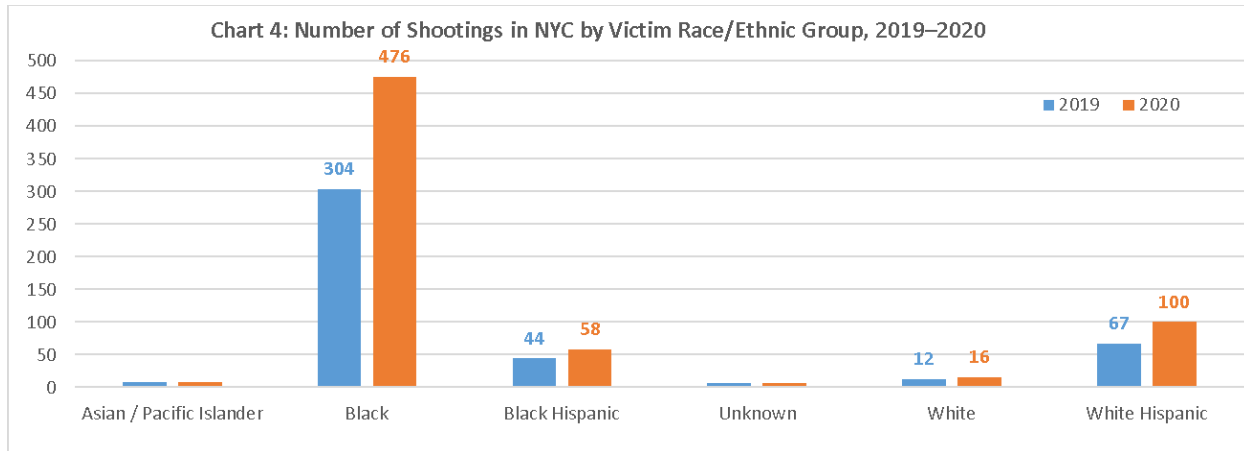
2020/2019 Gun-Related Violence in NYC

Data from the New York Police Department (NYPD) shed some light on this phenomenon: during the period January to June 2020, 664 shootings were recorded against 442 during the same timeframe in 2019 (City of New York Police Department, n.d.). As illustrated in Chart 3 below, the increase has impacted, as victims, in particular the age group between 25 and 44 years old. Males have been recorded as 90% of the victims in 2020.

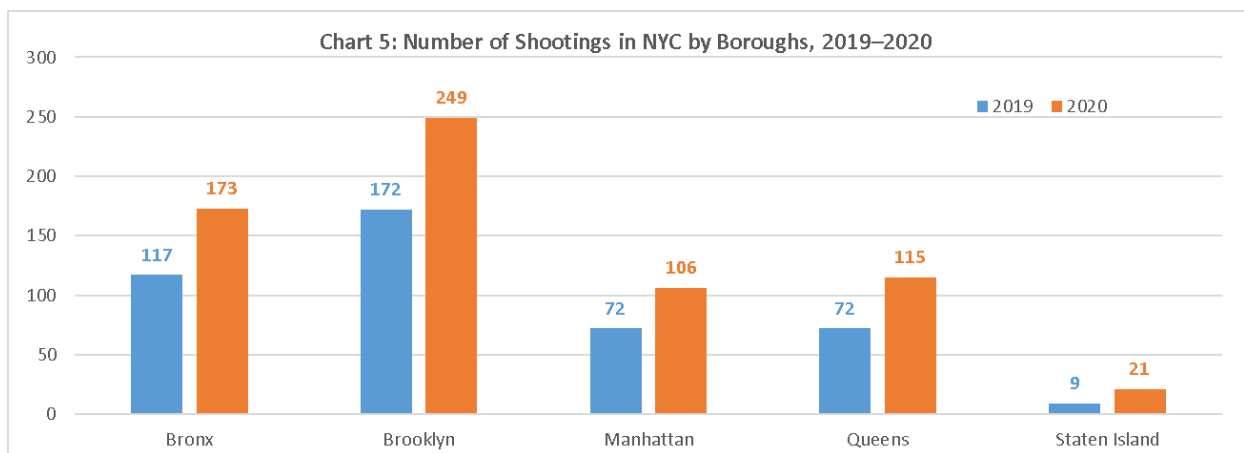


Source: City of New York Police Department, n.d.

Data on victims' race/ethnic background and location of incidents brings to light the communities have been hit most: the number of black victims have increased of +56% from 2019 to 2020 (Chart 4), while the most affected NYC borough have been Queens (approximate increase of 60%) and Bronx (+ 48%) (Chart 5).



Source: City of New York Police Department, n.d.



Source: City of New York Police Department, n.d.

Gang-Related Gun Violence

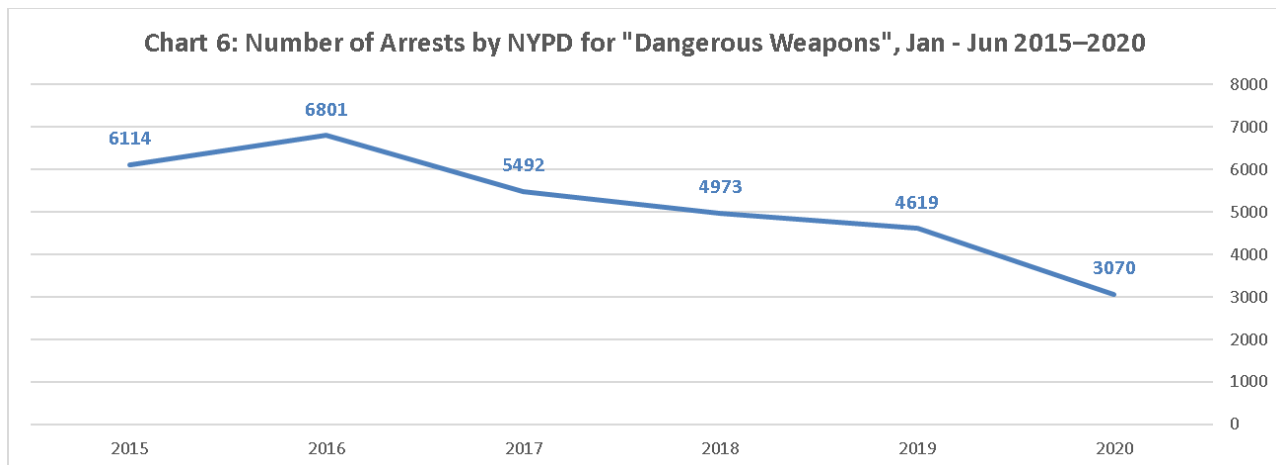
The increase in shootings can be traced to a surge of gang-related violence in deprived urban areas. This latter trend, already a long-term problem in certain areas, has accelerated thanks to the fallout of the lockdown measures, implemented to control Covid-19 infections, in particular on youths living in disadvantaged neighborhoods. The stay-at-home orders, currently in place in many States, have exposed in some urban areas a long-standing problem (gun-violence), which gang violence is currently festering on, creating a public safety challenge in some inner-city areas, where no one is spared: targeted individuals and passers-by in houses, vehicles and public areas are hit by flying bullets at a higher rate than last year (Cuellar D., 2020). For example, from 7 p.m. Friday, May 29, through 5 a.m. Monday, June 1, 25 people were killed in Chicago, IL, with another 85 wounded by gunfire (Schuba, T., Charles, S. and Hendrickson M. 2020).

The current lockdown measures have inadvertently created a gap in the life of many US inner-cities' youths. Social institutions, that used to keep city communities safe and allowed youths to socialize in non-harmful ways, such as schools, churches and recreation centers, have closed down. Lockdown has also created an economic recession that has impacted negatively especially youths and lower-income earners (Morath, E. and Dougherty, D. 2020). Gang-related violence has thus increased, including drive-by shootings and discharges of firearms in occupied vehicles/dwelling. These are highly dangerous incidents that have nefarious consequences to the people living in

some lower-income inner city communities. For example, NYC Queens has recorded an increase of nearly 60% shootings between the first 6 months of 2020 and the same timeframe in 2019 (City of New York Police Department, n.d.).

Police-Minority Communities’ Tensions and Pro-Active Policing

The already dire social-economic situation and the surge of gang-related gun violence, linked to the impact of the Covid-19, was aggravated by the recent, mostly peaceful but occasionally violent, protests against widely publicized police brutality in cities across the US, which exposed a long-term trend in low legitimacy and trust among minorities of law enforcement personnel. While the economic recession and the firearm-violence wreaked havoc on some inner city areas, the increased police-minority communities’ tensions escalated a trend of reduction in proactive policing by local law enforcement agencies, (Mac Donald, H. 2016), illustrated by the overall reduction of some arrests categories, such as weapon-related offenses. Data from NYPD show that, right when murders, linked to gun-violence, increased in the first six months of 2020, arrests for weapon-related charges decreased (City of New York Police Department, n.d.). As illustrated in Chart 6, arrests in New York City for the category “Dangerous Weapons” during the first six months of the year, have been decreasing since 2016, with an all-time year low in 2020. Arrests have been recorded a 33% reduction from 2020 to last year, and a more than 50% decrease if compared 2016¹.



Source: City of New York Police Department, n.d.

Arrests of weapon-related offenses require proactive policing (e.g. traffic stops, suspicious vehicle/person) in high violent-crime neighborhoods, plagued by drive-by shootings, to detect, for example, convicted felon illegally in possession of guns or criminal elements waiting for the right opportunity to commit a violent, often deadly, crime. Furthermore, tension between communities and the police can result in decreased willingness to contact them when a crime occur or to cooperate with investigations to apprehend offenders (Rosenfeld R., 2016 and 2017)

Researchers pointed out, in 2015, the reduction in arrests while homicides increased in some major US cities. The (partial) explanation was deemed to be the “Ferguson Effect” on crime rates, which links increases in crime to reduction of pro-active policing and community-police tensions in the

¹ 2016 was a leap year.

aftermath of widely publicized deadly encounters between the police and African-Americans (Mac Donald, H. 2016).

Conclusions

We are probably witnessing the cusps of various phenomena that have been occurring for some time, such as the increase in gangs related gun-violence in disadvantaged, lower-income urban areas, the tension between minority communities and law enforcement, and the reduction of pro-active policing by local police agencies. All these long-term trends have been exacerbated by the fallout of the Covid-19 on the social-economic lives, especially of youths in depressed urban areas. The negative repercussions of the recent stay-at-home orders on the economy and social institutions in disadvantaged areas have thus speed up public safety challenges that already existed. Covid-19-related lockdown and groups movements' protests against police are not the root causes of gun-violence in certain US cities. Instead, they have just accelerated a trend already existing related to gang-violence in disadvantaged inner city areas in the last few years. A trend acknowledged by the US Government, for example, by the implementation, few years ago, of the Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN), an evidence-based violent crime reduction program that takes a collaborative approach to public safety (Department of Justice, n.d.).

To grasp the root causes of such increase in murders entails asking tough questions about, among others, the availability of illegal weapons, their origins (e.g. stolen firearms) and the law enforcement's efforts and methods to seize illegal firearms, in particular in high-crime neighborhoods by convicted felons. It is also required a thorough analysis of disaggregated spatial and temporal data from local police departments on the correlation between Covid-19 lockdowns, protests against police's brutality, recent spike in shootings and diminishing of pro-active policing practices. And while the political debate is continuing about the police' role in minorities communities, gang members have been using innovative methods to elude detection while continuing to wreak havoc among disadvantaged neighborhoods, for example through the use of "community guns", the practice of hiding and sharing available guns in strategic locations, such as near entrances of apartment complexes and streets drug-corners (Wilson M., 2012).

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