

After Surge During Pandemic, Homicides Fall Significantly

An analysis released Thursday by the Council on Criminal Justice shows that the majority of crimes the council tracks are continuing to decrease in 42 U.S. cities.



Listen to this article · 7:00 min [Learn more](#)

By Ashley Wu and Tim Arango

July 24, 2025

Homicides in the United States have continued to fall sharply this year, according to a new analysis published Thursday by the Council on Criminal Justice, a nonprofit policy research organization, based on data from more than three dozen American cities.

If the trend continues for the remainder of the year, the United States could post a third straight year of record declines in homicides.

Homicides in major cities

Total homicides over the preceding 12 months, plotted monthly

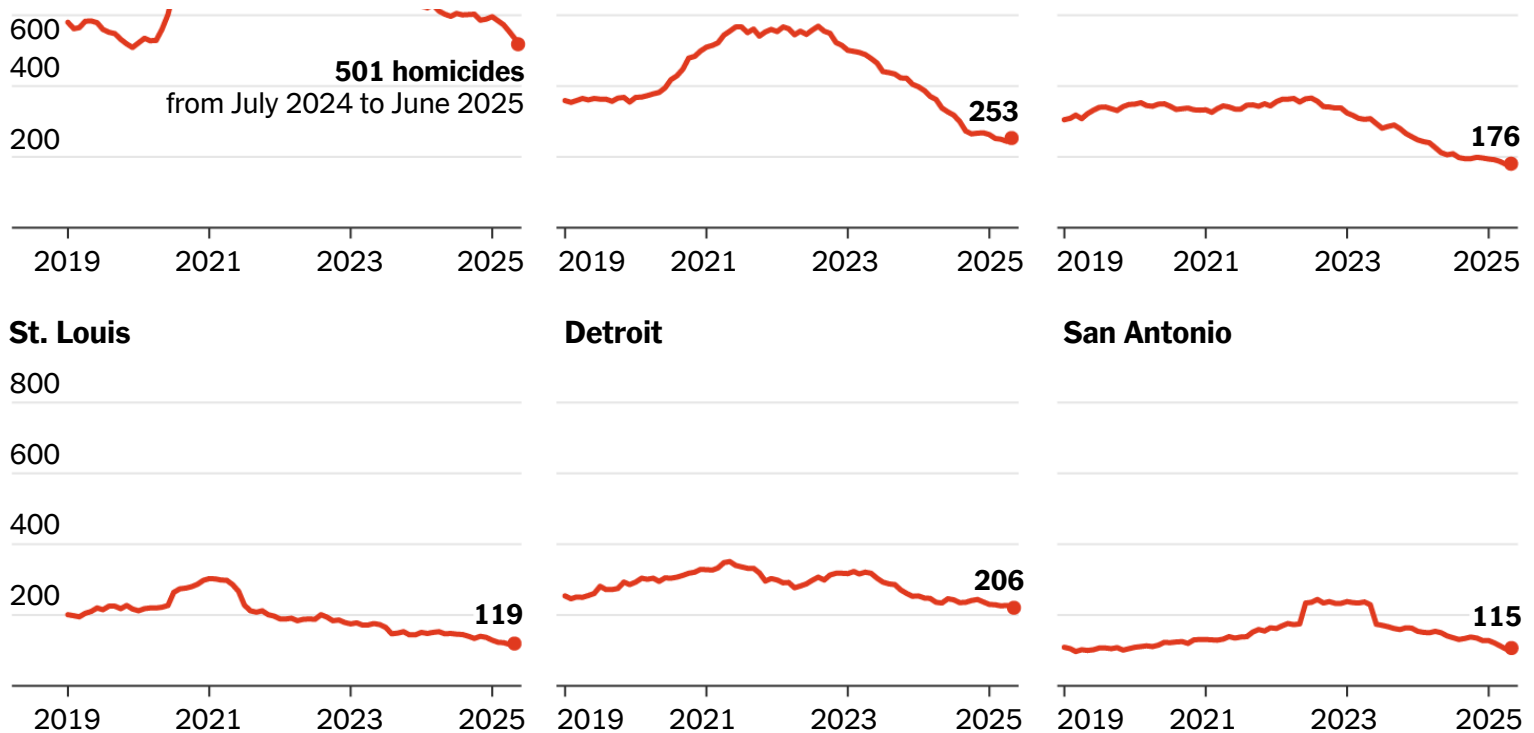
Chicago

800



Philadelphia

Baltimore



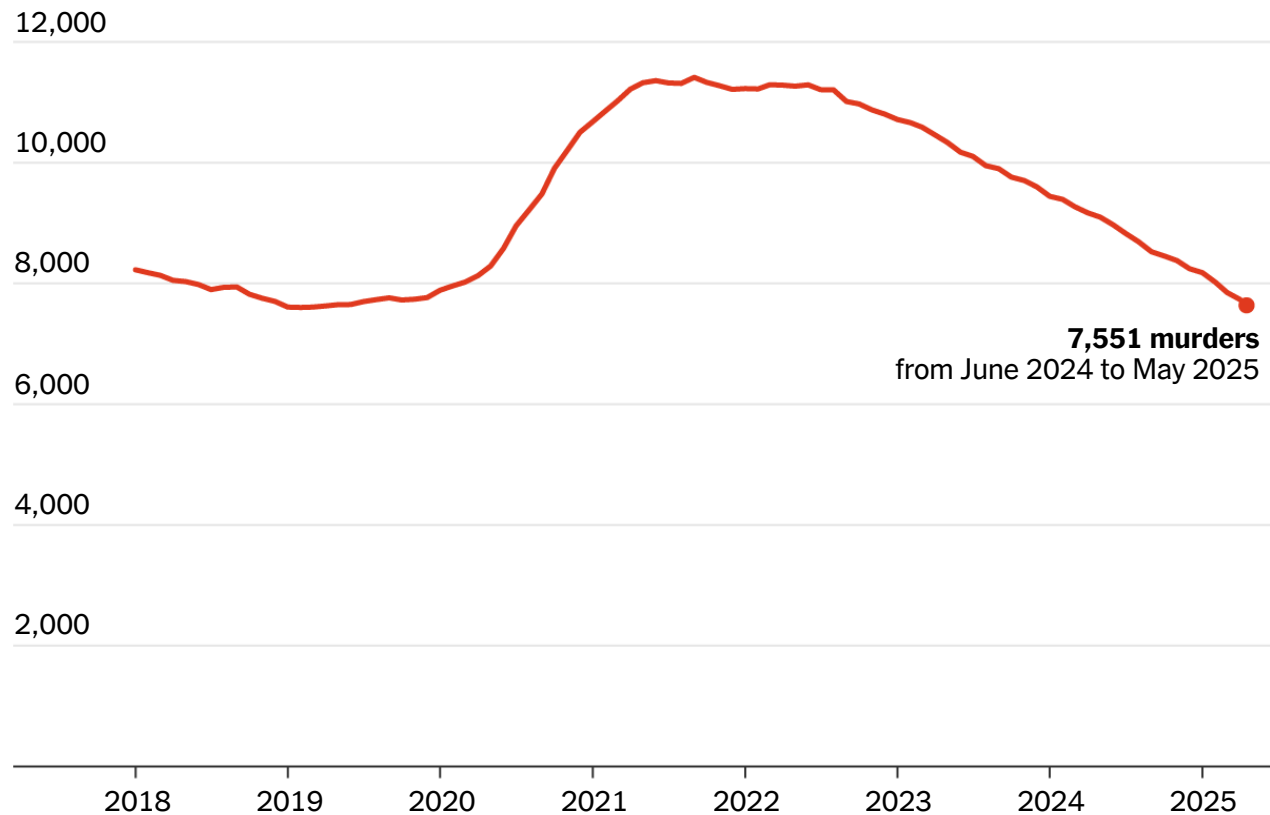
Source: Council on Criminal Justice • By The New York Times

In fact, the new analysis suggests that the broad crime surge that took place during the pandemic has largely reversed itself. Of 13 categories of crimes that the council tracks, only one — car theft — remains higher than in 2019, the year before the pandemic. But the council's study is limited to a sampling of 42 American cities whose police departments release data on a timely basis, and for which it can make comparisons to crime levels just before the pandemic. The smallest city in the study is Cary, N.C., and the largest is New York City.

The findings of the council's study through the first six months of this year largely align with other private sources of data that offer clues to national trends about crime. The F.B.I. has typically provided official nationwide crime data once a year. It last released nationwide statistics in September 2024.

Murders in the United States

Total murders over the preceding 12 months, plotted monthly



Note: Chart represents sample of 421 police agencies with available data. • Source: Real-Time Crime Index • By The New York Times

Overall, the council found that homicide rates fell 17 percent in the first half of the year in 30 cities it tracked in that category. But some of the largest cities, ones with historically high murder rates, posted much larger drops, according to the study. Chicago's rate is down 33 percent compared with the first six months of last year, St. Louis has fallen 22 percent in the same period, and Baltimore is down 24 percent.

Denver, which in 2021 recorded its highest number of homicides since 1981, had the sharpest decline in its homicide rate among the cities in the sample, down 45 percent compared with the same period last year, according to the study.

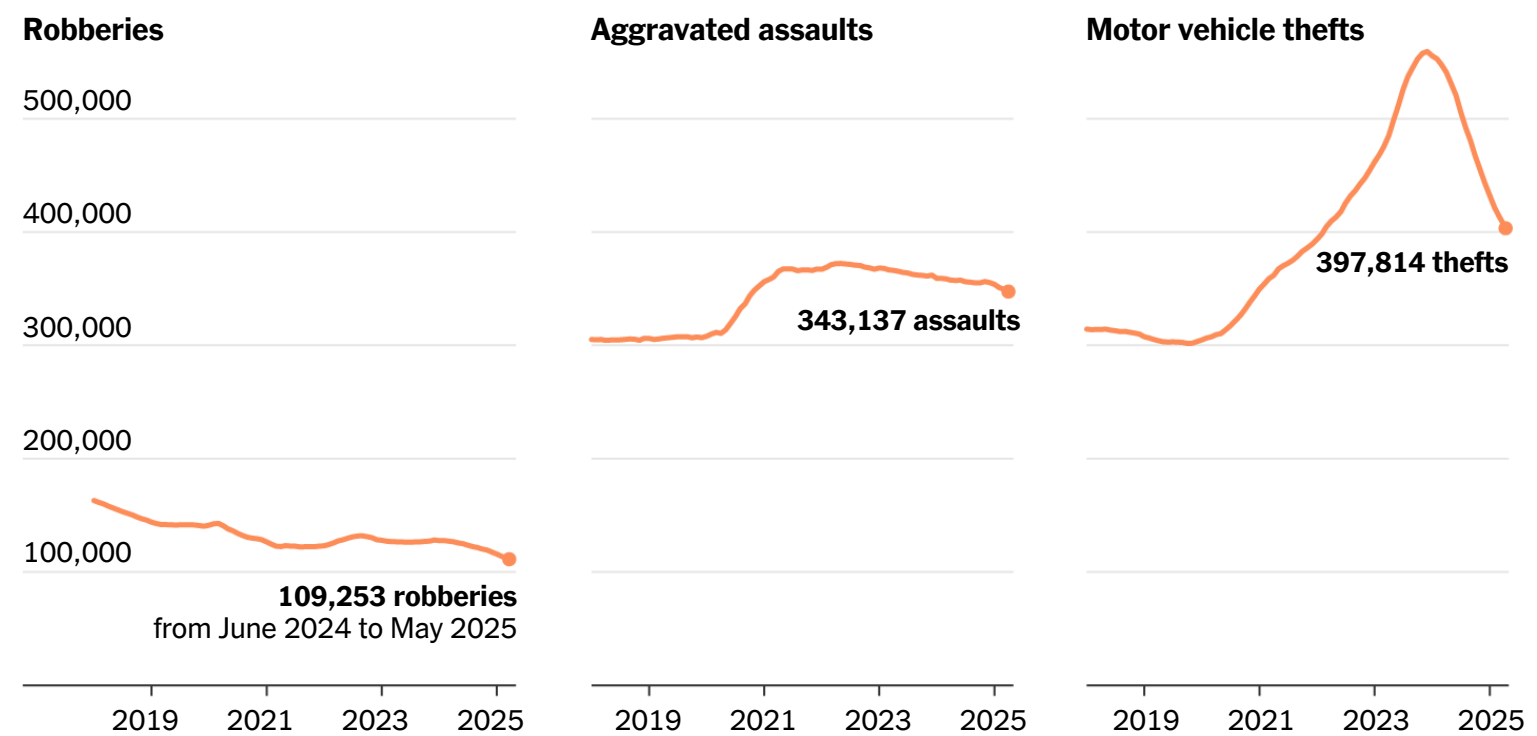
The Real-Time Crime Index, published by Jeff Asher, a New Orleans-based crime analyst, tracks a much larger number of cities than the council does. That index, which follows more than 400 police agencies, shows that murders are down 20

percent through May, compared with the same period in 2024.

Other violent crimes, such as robbery and aggravated assault, are also down significantly. In contrast to the council’s findings, Mr. Asher’s figures, based on his larger sample of cities, show that aggravated assaults are still higher than just before the pandemic.

Other crimes in the United States

Total reported incidents over the preceding 12 months, plotted monthly



Note: Chart on robberies show a sample of 417 police agencies, aggravated assaults show a sample of 414 agencies, and motor vehicle thefts show a sample of 417 agencies. • Source: Real-Time Crime Index • By The New York Times

Gun violence overall has also declined. According to an analysis by Mr. Asher based on data compiled by the Gun Violence Archive, there are 16.4 percent fewer shooting victims nationally this year through June as compared with the same period last year.

In addition, the Major Cities Chiefs Association, an organization of police executives from 69 of the largest cities in the U.S., reported double-digit declines in four violent crime categories in most of the cities they represent in the first three months of this year as compared with last year. Homicides and robbery were each down 20 percent, while rape fell 14 percent and aggravated assault was down 11 percent.

After surging in 2020 and 2021, homicides started to decline in 2022. But in 2023 they fell at what was then the fastest rate in recorded history, and they have been falling even faster ever since.

Even shoplifting, which increased last year as cities struggled to deal with retail theft, has fallen by double digits so far this year, according to the council's analysis, which relied on data from 25 cities on that topic. Shoplifting had become a topic of political debates, especially in California, where voters who were frustrated with seeing so many items in stores locked away approved a ballot measure to roll back a major criminal justice reform law and impose tougher penalties for stealing.

Criminologists say it's too early to provide definitive explanations for the whipsaw-like shifts in crime of recent years. Adding to the puzzle, say analysts, is that crime has fallen so sharply despite a surge in gun buying during the pandemic, and despite decreases in staffing levels at police agencies.

"Probably in the most simple form, it's simply that the shock waves of the pandemic that contributed to the spike have largely dissipated," said Adam Gelb, the president and chief executive officer of the Council on Criminal Justice.

That the trends have been national in scope has challenged assumptions that local factors, like policy decisions or funding for safety programs, are the most important. "It feels like what's happened over the last five years has upended

some long-held beliefs about crime,” Mr. Gelb said. “In particular, that levels of crimes and patterns are very locally driven and determined.”

Mr. Asher believes that large increases in public spending during and after the pandemic, on projects like road and highway construction and community centers, most likely contributed to the decrease in crime.

“If you want to explain it, you have to explain why it’s happening everywhere, why it’s happening in spite of the fact that we didn’t fix poverty, we didn’t fix education,” he said.

John Roman, the director of the Center on Public Safety and Justice at NORC at the University of Chicago, also points to the recovery of local government employment as a factor in the decline of crime. Between March and May 2020, more than 1.2 million local government employees lost their jobs around the country, about 8 percent of the local government work force at the time.

“It isn’t just that Covid disrupted people’s routines — it disrupted the fabric of support,” Mr. Roman said. Local government employs teachers, counselors, coaches, police officers, social workers and other service providers — the people who often engage directly with those at risk of committing crimes or becoming victims. As the work force recovered, he argued, crime lessened.

“The theories and credit-taking claims are abundant,” Mr. Gelb said. “And a lot of the arguments have familiar contours. The right says it’s tougher enforcement and penalties. The left says it’s better programs and community investment. The bottom line is it’s likely a blend of both.”

Ashley Wu is a graphics reporter for The Times who uses data and visuals to help explain complex topics.

Tim Arango is a correspondent covering national news. He is based in Los Angeles.

A version of this article appears in print on , Section A, Page 9 of the New York edition with the headline: After Surge During the

Pandemic, U.S. Homicides Fall Sharply