

By Marc Stier with Kehinde Akande and Diana Polson

October 18, 2022

Violent crime, especially murder, shocks us all.<sup>1</sup> It directly harms the victims of crime. It undermines the sense of security of all of us. And it creates difficulties for our communities. High crime rates in a community both discourage business investment and consumption, leading to economic distress and poverty.

These are all reasons for our political leaders to talk about crime and how to control it often and honestly.

Sadly, however, in this election season Republican politicians have talked incessantly but, in more than one respect, have failed to do so honestly. To begin with, they have blamed Democrats—including Philadelphia’s district attorney, Larry Krasner—for the recent rise in the murder rate in the United States. But the notion that the murder rate is increasing faster in Democratic cities or states or Philadelphia than in Republican-controlled jurisdictions is demonstrably false. Even worse, they consistently put forward proposals for reducing the murder rate, such as increasing the size of police forces, that are likely to have a limited impact—while ignoring those that a great deal of research shows will make a difference such as reducing poverty and limiting access to guns.

## *The increase in Philadelphia’s murders increase in context*

### *The National Context*

Since Republicans across the state are, as usual, pointing the finger at Philadelphia, let’s start there, Philadelphia has, seen an increase in murders of 58%, from 356 to 561 during the pandemic from a starting point that was already high. Republicans want to blame it on District Attorney Larry Krasner’s policies. Yet the truth is that the number of murders has been going up during the pandemic everywhere in the country as well as in Pennsylvania. The murder rate rose [nationally by 20% between 2019 and 2020](#) and another [6% between 2020 and 2021](#).

No one is exactly sure the mechanism by which the pandemic led to higher murders rates. Some suspect that the [stress of the pandemic itself](#), including the economic distress and family deaths from COVID-19 were especially traumatic in low-income communities. The closure of schools and after-school programs, as well as disruption families, often as a result of COVID-19 deaths, led to many young people being unsupervised too much of the time. The pandemic forced both cities, including Philadelphia, and non-profits to curtail social services that had some impact on reducing violence. And even those that continued to operate were forced to operate virtually.<sup>2</sup> Gun sales increased dramatically during the pandemic, a reflection of a rise in fear that is partly explained by the rise in murders and perhaps also by the pandemic itself, as well the false belief spread by right-wing politicians that harsh new gun control measures would soon be introduced in

---

<sup>1</sup> The text of this policy paper was written by Marc Stier with the exception of three paragraphs drawn from the We The People-PA policy paper on Ending Mass Incarceration, written by Diana Polson, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vtNCXOuq9OpEfoIKuBjBHWqPninoKeGy/view>. Kehinde Akande provided much of the data in tables 1 and 2 and wrote a preliminary analysis of the study of state crime rates.

<sup>2</sup> A good discussion of these problems is Ames Grawert and Noah Kim, Myths and Realities: Understanding Recent Trends in Violent Crime, Brennan Center for Justice, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/myths-and-realities-understanding-recent-trends-violent-crime>.

response to a series of mass shooting. The proliferation of guns throughout the country meant that everyday conflicts combined with short tempers too often escalated into violence. It's also possible that in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, people were more reluctant to call on the police to deal with disputes that will lead to violence and that the police, fearing confrontations with members to intervene of the community, were slower to intervene in potentially violent situations.

Whatever the cause, the results are clear. There was a substantial increase in the number of people murdered throughout the country. And while the overall rate of increase between 2019 and 2021 was almost 38%. And if we look at 38 of the largest cities in the country (table 1)—which typically have higher murder rates than suburban and rural because they also have higher poverty rates—we can see that the two-year increase was 58% which is almost exactly the percentage increase in murders in Philadelphia in these two years. Many cities—including New York, Rochester, San Francisco, Milwaukee, Syracuse, Los Angeles, Houston, and Compton—saw a two-year increase in murders of 100% or more. The percentage increase in murders in 21 of the 38 cities we surveyed more than the 58% found nationally and in Philadelphia.

Table 1

<b>Murders in 38 Cities, 2019 and 2021</b>			
City	2019 Murders	2021 Murders	Percentage Increase in Murders
Rochester, NY	20	81	305%
New York, NY	172	468	172%
San Francisco, CA	25	56	124%
Syracuse, NY	13	29	123%
Milwaukee, WI	92	197	114%
Los Angeles, CA	190	392	106%
Houston, TX	231	473	105%
Compton, CA	17	34	100%
Washington, DC	115	226	97%
Denver, CO	50	96	92%
Oakland, CA	71	134	89%
Atlanta, GA	83	156	88%
Las Vegas, NV	79	147	86%
Seattle, WA	22	40	82%
Buffalo, NY	37	67	81%
Memphis, TN	190	342	80%
Chicago, IL	448	797	78%
Greensboro, NC	30	53	77%
Indianapolis, IN	160	271	69%
Phoenix, AZ	120	198	65%
Richmond, VA	55	89	62%
<b>Philadelphia, PA</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>58%</b>
Lexington-Fayette, KY	23	36	57%
Hartford, CT	23	35	52%
Tulsa, OK	42	62	48%
New Orleans, LA	152	218	43%
Omaha, NE	23	32	39%
Dallas, TX	167	220	32%
Oklahoma City, OK	64	82	28%
Detroit, MI	267	309	16%
Kansas City, MO	137	155	13%
Baltimore, MD	319	337	6%
St. Louis, MO	197	195	-1%
Charlotte, NC	103	98	-5%
Boston, MA	57	40	-30%
Pittsburgh, PA	81	55	-32%
Newark, NJ	85	57	-33%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4,316</b>	<b>6,838</b>	<b>58%</b>
See appendix for sources.			

Given this evidence, it is very difficult to conclude that circumstances unique to Philly, were responsible for the 58% increase in murders.

### *The Pennsylvania Context*

In addition to putting the increase in murders in Philadelphia in a nationwide context, it's useful to put in in a Pennsylvania context. Republican members of the PA General Assembly, with the support of some Democrats, have been investigating Philadelphia DA Larry Krasner because of the recent upsurge in murders. Some of them have called for him to be impeached and removed from office. Yet when we look at county data throughout the state, we see that many counties have had a much percentage increase in the number of murders (table 2).

Table 2

Homicides by PA County in 2019 and 2021			
	Homicides 2019	Homicides 2021	Percentage Change 19 to 21
WASHINGTON	1	9	800%
LEBANON	1	5	400%
FAYETTE	2	9	350%
ADAMS	1	4	300%
CHESTER	3	11	267%
BEAVER	4	14	250%
NORTHUMBERLAND	3	8	167%
MONROE	5	13	160%
CAMBRIA	2	5	150%
LEHIGH	7	16	129%
BLAIR	1	2	100%
MIFFLIN	1	2	100%
ALLEGHENY	79	136	72%
BERKS	13	22	69%
LUZERNE	10	16	60%
<b>PHILADELPHIA</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>58%</b>
ERIE	9	13	44%
DELAWARE	30	39	30%
NORTHAMPTON	5	6	20%
DAUPHIN	21	24	14%
BUCKS	9	10	11%
MONTGOMERY	17	18	6%
BEDFORD	3	3	0%
CARBON	1	1	0%
CRAWFORD	3	3	0%
CUMBERLAND	5	5	0%
ELK	1	1	0%
LACKAWANNA	1	1	0%
MERCER	2	2	0%
WESTMORELAND	7	7	0%
LANCASTER	14	13	-7%
YORK	25	19	-24%
LAWRENCE	8	6	-25%
BUTLER	2	1	-50%
FRANKLIN	4	2	-50%
PIKE	2	1	-50%
VENANGO	2	1	-50%
SCHUYLKILL	5	2	-60%
SOMERSET	3	1	-67%
LYCOMING	8	2	-75%
WARREN	8	1	-88%
BRADFORD	3	0	-100%
CENTRE	4	0	-100%
CLINTON	1	0	-100%
JUNIATA	1	0	-100%
MONTOUR	1	0	-100%
WAYNE	2	0	-100%
WYOMING	1	0	-100%
<b>Total*</b>	<b>697</b>	<b>1025</b>	<b>47%</b>

\* Counties with zero murders in 2019 are excluded from the table but are included in the totals. See appendix for source.

Among three of the leading critics of Philadelphia DA Krasner are Rep. Tim O'Neal of Washington County, where the murders increased by 800% during the pandemic, Rep. Torren Ecker of Adams

County, which has seen an increase of 300% in murders between 2019 and 2021 and Rep. Josh Kail of Beaver County, which has seen a 250% increase in murders in this same period. One would think that if these representatives looked seriously at the increase in murders in their own backyard, they might have second thoughts about blaming the far lower 58% increase on the policies of Mr. Krasner.

At any rate the evidence comparing Philadelphia to other cities across the country, and counties across Pennsylvania, throws substantial doubt on the Republican claim that “soft on crime” policies pursued by District Attorney Krasner are responsible the spike in murders in the city.

### Murder in Red States and Blue States

Other evidence also undermines the same claim. A recent report from Third Way points out that murder rates are higher in red states that supported Donald Trump in 2020 than blue states that supported Joe Biden.<sup>3</sup> In addition there are many cities with Republican mayors that have higher murder rates than cities with Democratic mayors.

The Third Way report shows that the murder rate in the 25 states that voted for Donald Trump had a murder rate of 8.2 per 100,000 which is 40% higher than the 5.78 per 100,000 murder rate in the 25 states that voted for Joe Biden. Eight of the ten states with the highest murder rates are red states. And between 2019 and 2010 the murder rate increased in the Red states at a slightly higher rate (32.2%) than the blue states (30.8%). Six of the ten states with greatest increase in the murder rate were red states.

### How To Reduce the Murder Rate: What the Evidence Shows

It is important not to make too much of this data. Cross-county, cross-state and cross-national comparisons have limited evidentiary value in trying to understand the cause of murder. Different jurisdictions vary in many ways that are likely be far more important to the murder rate than who is in charge politically. We would *never* claim that Republican control over a city, state or county, would directly cause an increase in the murder rate. We think any such claims are likely to be bogus. And we are presenting this data to point out that data clearly rebuts the politically motivated—and dishonest—claims by Republican politicians blaming rising crime in Philadelphia and elsewhere on Democratic policies.

So in this final section of the paper we want to take a step back from the immediate data and focus on what we know in general about reducing crime and especially murder.

Liberals and conservatives have different strategies for reducing the murder rate. We believe that the evidence shows us that only one of these strategies can work in a way that comparts with our values.

#### *The Conservative Strategy*

The right-wing strategy comes down to police repression—such as the wanton use of stop and frisk—an increasing sentence in order to put more many people behind bars so that they can’t commit crimes, which is known as the incapacitation strategy. There is a superficial plausibility to this idea that is reinforced any time someone commits a murder who had been arrested for some previous offense. And since a large number of most people who commit murder do have some

---

<sup>3</sup> Kylie Murdock and Jim Kessler, The Red State Murder Problem, Third Way, March 15, 2022, <https://www.thirdway.org/report/the-red-state-murder-problem>.

kind of police record, it is easy supporters of the right wing strategy to say, “see, if this person had been in jail he wouldn’t have committed murder.”

The flaw in this strategy is quite simple: even if most murders have some kind of criminal record, the vast majority of people with a criminal record never commit a murder. And given the proliferation of guns and the long, wasteful war on crime which has dragged far too many people into the criminal justice system, many people in low-income communities have an arrest record or conviction for some minor offense. Very few of them will murder anyone. We can’t just arrest the corner drug dealers or people holding guns illegally who are likely to commit murder in the future. We don’t know who they are. Criminologists have very little capacity to predict who will move on from committing non-violent—*theft, robbery, drug dealing, possession of firearms*—to murder. And even if they did have such a capacity there are serious ethical issues in using highly uncertain social science theories to determine who should spend more time in jail. Equality under the law seems to require that people be judged and punished on the basis of what they have done, not what we believe they might to do.

Faced with these practical and moral issues, in the years since the 1970s, criminal justice policy in the United States dramatically raised incarceration rates for all. Pennsylvania was one of the leaders in this effort with our incarceration and supervision rates increasing six-fold since the 1970s. Pennsylvania is one of only four states that has seen incarceration increase by over 500% since 1978.<sup>4</sup> These incarceration rates were not due to an increase in crime or arrests. Between 2004 and 2014, reported violent crime decreased by 21% and property crime decreased 18%—yet the combined felony and misdemeanor sentences increased by 15% during this same time period.<sup>5</sup> The main drivers of overincarceration are the share of offenders sent to prison and the length of their stay, both of which are under the control of policymakers. The likelihood of an individual going to prison for a drug offense increased by 350% between 1980 and 2010. The average time served has also increased—from 1990 to 2009, the average time served for property crimes increased by 25% and 37% for violent and drug crimes.<sup>6</sup>

Now we should be clear that there is some evidence that putting more people in jail does have an impact on crime rates in general and presumably on murder rates. But the impact is relatively low. Even the largest estimate of the impact of increased incarceration suggests that it reduces the crime rate by no more than 20%.<sup>7</sup>

This relatively small reduction in crime has, however, come with extraordinary costs, both financial and moral.

---

<sup>4</sup> Michael Mitchell. The Big Picture: Incarceration and Pennsylvania’s State Budget.” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Powerpoint. March 3, 2016

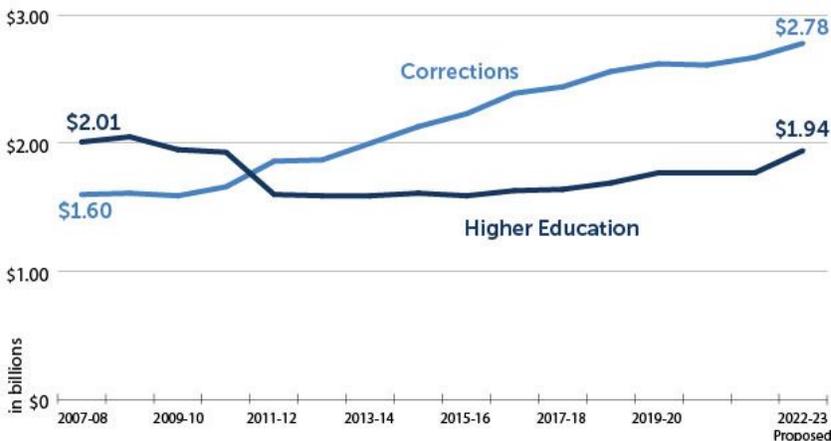
<sup>5</sup> <http://www.pacenterofexcellence.pitt.edu/documents/Pennsylvania%20Justice%20Reinvestment%202-16.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Michael Mitchell. The Big Picture: Incarceration and Pennsylvania’s State Budget.” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Powerpoint. March 3, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> This estimate is from Jacqueline Cohen *Incapacitation as a Strategy for Crime Control: Possibilities and Pitfalls, Crime and Justice, Volume 5, 1983.* More recent research suggests the reduction in crime rates from mass incarceration was between 10% and 15%. See the discussion at Pew Charitable Trusts, *Weighing Imprisonment and Crime: 9 experts weight the relationship between prisons and crime*, February 10, 2015 <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2014/09/weighing-imprisonment-and-crime>.

The financial costs to the state are obvious. As figure 1 shows, between Fiscal Year 2007-08 and the current Fiscal Years, state spending on corrections was projected to rise from \$1.6 billion to \$2.78 billion for the roughly 46,000 people incarcerated in state prisons. This figure does not include the cost of local jails which hold roughly 37,000 more people with an annual cost of \$1.6 billion in 2020.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 1



**State Funding for Criminal Justice Surpassed Funding for Higher Education in 2011-12 and Has Been Steadily Growing**

The huge costs of imprisoning so many people, of course, don't include the additional costs of police forces, prosecutors, and courts. One estimate is that these costs are twice that of spending for prisons alone.<sup>9</sup>

While the costs to the government and tax payers are easy to measure, the cost to individuals and families are high as well. Individuals lose not only the wages they might have earned outside of prison but the career experience that might have enabled them to earn higher wages. And, of course, those who are incarcerated often find it difficult to secure good jobs once they leave prison, which can lead to recidivism. Families lose husbands and fathers who could and would have provided both economic and emotional support. In Pennsylvania, nearly two out of three people in prison are parents and 81,096 children (about 3% of all minors) have a parent imprisoned.<sup>10</sup> Having a parent imprisoned increases the likelihood of homelessness due to decreased family income, especially for Black children. When mothers are imprisoned, kids often end up in foster care.<sup>11</sup> Communities also lose the income that people serving long prison sentences might contributed to local economies. These economic costs all contribute to poverty in any one generation and, by making life unnecessarily difficult for children, in subsequent generations as well.

<sup>8</sup> Prison population numbers are from Pennsylvania Profile, Prison Policy Initiative, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/PA.html>. The local cost of prisons are from Bureau of the Census, Annual Survey of State and Local Government Finances, <https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/2020/econ/local/public-use-datasets.html>,

<sup>9</sup> Peter Wagner and Bernadette Rabuy, Prison Policy Initiative, Follow The Money of Mass Incarceration, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/money.html>,

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cor.pa.gov/About%20Us/Initiatives/Pages/Children-of-Incarcerated-Parents.aspx>

<sup>11</sup> <http://humantolofjail.vera.org/the-family-jail-cycle/>

It is difficult to estimate the total impact of these costs and related ones but a recent study estimates them at \$1.014 trillion a year in the United States as a whole.<sup>12</sup> Using our usual estimate that Pennsylvania's share of national costs are roughly equal to our 4% share of the population, and subtracting the roughly \$12 billion cost of incarceration and the criminal justice system, gives us a yearly cost in Pennsylvania of \$28.5 billion per year.

On top of these financial and economic costs—but no less important—is the injustice done by mass incarceration. Here there are two issues. The first is whether it is just to holding large number of people in jail for longer periods of time because we believe that some percentage of them will commit crimes if they are released from prison. There are no obvious standards of justice for setting prison and certainly the impact of prison terms on deterring others from committing crimes or incapacitating potential recidivists is part of the moral equation. But most of us believe that there the outer limit on how long someone should spend is set by some moral equivalent between the harm that convicted criminals have done and their punishment. Convicted criminals lose some of their moral rights as human beings. But they don't lose their rights not to be treated simply as means to our ends. And there can be little doubt that the use of mass incarceration in the United States as a whole and in Pennsylvania in particular to reduce crime violates that moral standard.

The second moral issue raised by mass incarceration is the impact of racial bias in prison sentences. Racial disparities plague Pennsylvania's criminal justice system. Black people account for 47% of Pennsylvania's prison population despite making up only 10% of the adult population in the state. Black Pennsylvanians are imprisoned at nine times the rate of white Pennsylvanians. For example, Black and white people use marijuana at roughly the same rate, yet Black people are 3.73 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession.<sup>13</sup> The prison population in Pennsylvania is also increasingly female and older with the female prison population increasing 28% in the last 10 years (2006-2016) and the population aged 50 and older increasing 70% in that same time period.<sup>14</sup>

And finally a third moral issue raised by mass incarceration is the impact on those who are mentally ill. Since Pennsylvania's state mental health hospitals shut down, prisons have increasingly become repositories for those with mental health problems. Twenty-nine percent of the male prison population in 2016 were on the Mental Health Roster—a system that classifies prisoners' mental health status. In 2016, nine percent were considered seriously mentally ill. These percentages were much larger for female inmates with 70% on the Mental Health Roster and 20% considered seriously mentally ill. In 2016, 65% of imprisoned Pennsylvanians were in need of some type of alcohol or drug treatment.<sup>15</sup>

Given the financial and moral costs of the strategy of repression and incapacitation, we can understand why there are so many critics of it today. And, interestingly enough both Democrats

---

<sup>12</sup> Michael McLaughlin, Carrie Pettus-Davis, Derek Brown, Chris Veeh, and Tanya Renn, The Economic Burden of Incarceration in the United States, Working Paper #IJRD-072016, Institute for Justice Research and Development, Florida State University, [https://ijrd.csw.fsu.edu/sites/g/files/upcbnu1766/files/media/images/publication\\_pdfs/Economic\\_Burden\\_of\\_Incarceration\\_IJRD072016\\_0\\_0.pdf](https://ijrd.csw.fsu.edu/sites/g/files/upcbnu1766/files/media/images/publication_pdfs/Economic_Burden_of_Incarceration_IJRD072016_0_0.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.aclu.org/report/report-war-marijuana-black-and-white?redirect=report/war-marijuana-black-and-white>

<sup>14</sup> ACLU-PA. "Blueprint for Smart Justice - Pennsylvania." Accessed at: <https://50stateblueprint.aclu.org/states/pennsylvania/>.

<sup>15</sup> ACLU-PA. "Blueprint for Smart Justice - Pennsylvania." Accessed at: <https://50stateblueprint.aclu.org/states/pennsylvania/>.

and Republicans—when they are not running for office—share in much of this criticism. The late Senator Stewart Greenleaf, (R-Montgomery), who was a staunch advocate of stiff mandatory minimum sentences early in his career concluded by the end of it that it was a “failed policy” and that it was time to “let it go.” And he became the leading Republican in support of a reform agenda that include [“clean slates’ for people with criminal records](#), funding for indigent defense, [protection from prosecution for sex-trafficking victims](#), treatment over punishment for people in addiction, increased access to DNA testing for exoneration, and a [“justice reinvestment”](#) bill that would save an estimated \$55 million a year by automatically paroling people serving short sentences when they hit their minimum.”<sup>16</sup>

### *Progressive Strategies: Gun Control*

Progressives offer two alternative strategies for reducing the murder rate: controlling access to guns and reducing economic inequality.

A great deal of research has been done in recent years that support both strategies. We can’t do more than explain the logic of these strategies and point to some of the evidence that supports the.

When Americans compare murder rates in the United States to that of other countries, they often conclude that the United States must be, for one reason or another, a country inherently more prone to crime than other countries. Yet recent research by Franklin E. Zimring has very much called this idea into question.<sup>17</sup> Crime rates, including violent crime rates in the United States area by and large *not* higher than in other advanced countries but, rather are roughly in the same ball park. Yet our murder rates are far higher.

One major explanation of the difference is the extraordinary availability of guns in our country. Conservatives are right to say that people, not guns, kill other people. But they forget that it is far easier to kill someone—or oneself—with a gun than in any other way. The extraordinary availability guns in this country is thus the fundamental reason that our murder rates are so high.

Studies that compare gun control policy in the fifty states have also shown that stricter gun laws tend to be associated with lower murder rates.<sup>18</sup>

Not only do we know that reducing the supply of guns in our country would reduce our murder rates, we also know what *kind* of gun control is most effective. Two recent studies reached a similar conclusion: keeping guns out of the hands of those most likely to use them to commit murder is far more important than reducing the kinds of guns that are available: “universal background checks, permit requirements, “may issue” laws (where local authorities have discretion in approving who can carry a concealed weapon), and laws banning people convicted of violent

---

<sup>16</sup> Samantha Melamed, How Stewart Greenleaf got woke - and what his retirement means for smart-on-crime reforms

<sup>17</sup> Franklin E. Zimring and Gordon Hawkins, *Crime is not the Problem: Lethal Violence in America*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. For more recent data see Erin Grinsheyn and David Hemenway, Violent Death Rates: The US Compared with Other High-Income OECD Countries, 2010 *The American Journal of Medicine*, Vol. 129, Issue 3, March 2016, pp 266-273.

<sup>18</sup> Everytown Research and Policy, Gun Safety Policies Save Lives, <https://everytownresearch.org/rankings/>; Michael Siegel, The Impact of State-Level Firearms Laws on Homicide Rates by Race/Ethnicity, Office of Justice Programs, National Criminal Justice Reference Service, April 2020, <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/254669.pdf>.

misdeemeanors from possessing firearms are, individually and collectively, significantly able to reduce gun-related deaths.”<sup>19</sup>

### *Progressive Strategies: Reducing Economic Inequality*

A second progressive strategy for reducing murder rates is to reduce poverty and / or economic inequality. That murder rates are higher for those with lower incomes than higher incomes is very clearly established by a wide range of evidence. There is some dispute, however, about which is more important, how poor those with low incomes are in absolute or relative terms, that is whether people are more likely to commit murder when they struggle with low levels of economic well-being or whether they are more likely to commit murder when they live in a country with extreme income inequality. Those who argue that absolute levels of poverty are critical tend to assume that violent crime is a product of economic necessity, that is people relying on crime to provide for their families.<sup>20</sup> Those who argue that income inequality drives murder rates, tend to argue that young men who are seeking the respect of others but face blocked economic opportunity, both express their anger and frustration and seek respect and validation through in violence directed at others.<sup>21</sup>

It is not always easy to disentangle the evidence presented in support of these two theories largely because high rates of poverty tend to be correlated with high rates of inequality. My reading of the evidence suggests that, on the whole, the evidence in support of the explanation of high murder rates put forward by those who focus on economic inequality is stronger and that there are situations in which absolute or relative poverty rates—together with other factors such as the extent to which people living in poverty are aware of their relative deprivation, better capture the communal circumstances that are most likely to lead to high murder rates. But it is also clear more research and better specified models are needed to settle this dispute.

What is clear, however, is that economic deprivation is a cause of high murder rates. In too many American communities—mainly in big cities but also in rural areas—people living low-income communities are cut off from the economic opportunities that most of us take for granted. And it

---

<sup>19</sup> The FBI and CDC Datasets Agree: Who Has Guns—Not Which Guns—Linked to Murder Rates, The Brink: Pioneering Research from Boston University, August 6, 2019. The studies discussed in the article are Michael Siegel, Benjamin Solomon, Anita Knopov, Emily F Rothman, Shea W Cronin, Ziming Xuan, and David Hemenway, The Impact of State Firearm Laws on Homicide Rates in Suburban and Rural Areas Compared to Large Cities in the United States, 1991-2016, *Journal of Rural Health*, vol. 36, no. 2, March, 2020 pp. 255-265 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31361355/> and Michael Siegal, Molly Pahn, Ziming Xuan, Eric Fleegeler, and David Hemenway The Impact of State Firearm Laws on Homicide and Suicide Deaths in the USA, 1991–2016: a Panel Study, *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, Vol. 34, March 28, 2019. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11606-019-04922-x> These two articles reach the same conclusion based on the analysis of two different data sets. The first is based on FBI Uniform Crime Reports while the second is based on CDC data.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Kirk Williams Economic Sources of Homicide: Reestimating the Effects of Poverty and Inequality, *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 49, No. 2, Apr., 1984, pp. 283- 289, [https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy2.library.drexel.edu/stable/pdf/2095577.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A33bd9cb2394fc6b4cbe7c0a75d00c1fb&ab\\_segments=&origin=&acceptTC=1](https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy2.library.drexel.edu/stable/pdf/2095577.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A33bd9cb2394fc6b4cbe7c0a75d00c1fb&ab_segments=&origin=&acceptTC=1) and Joseph Quednau, "How are violent crime rates in U.S. cities affected by poverty?," *The Park Place Economist*: Vol. 28, <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/parkplace/vol28/iss1/8>

<sup>21</sup> The leading researcher who emphasizes the role of income inequality in leading to high murder rates is Martin Daly who claims that income inequality explains cross-national variation in murder rates “better than any other variable.” Maia Szalavitz, “[The surprising factor driving murder rates: income inequality and respect](#)”, *The Guardian*, December 8, 2017. He summarizes his research in *Killing the Competition*, London, Routledge, 2017.

is also clear that the lack of such opportunity in a society that is, on the whole not only prosperous but whose prosperity is vividly on display in our entertainment media creates deep frustrations and resentments, especially among young men who find that their path blocked to securing respect from others in the way is open to most of us—that is, through securing respected and good-paying jobs. These frustrations lead to violence both directly, as a means of gaining respect through criminal activity, and indirectly when they respond violently to interactions that they find disrespectful.

## Conclusion

When people hear of crime that point to the extraordinary availability of guns and the much higher rates of poverty and economic inequality found in the United States than other countries with advanced economics, they often respond by throwing their hands up, as if we don't know how to reduce the availability of guns or reduce poverty and inequality. There is no justification for that response. There is no mystery here. Public policies that would reduce the number of guns in our society and reduce economic inequality are fairly straightforward. They have been implemented successfully in other advanced societies. And while our long tradition of rejecting such policies means that implementing here would take time and effort—and with regard to gun control, a much more reasonable interpretation of the Second Amendment to the Constitution by the Supreme Court of the United States—over time these policies could be as effective here as they are abroad. And they would work if we attack both problems at once. A determined effort to reduce poverty in our large cities would very much help us get the extraordinary number of guns in poor communities off the streets. The best way to give young men a reason to hand in their guns is to give them a vision of a successful future that has nothing to do with criminal activity or the possession of a gun.

We have not failed to reduce the extraordinary high murder rates in our country and state because we lack knowledge. We have failed because we lack the political will. And make no mistake, the lack of political will is created in no small part by the politicians on the right who are most likely to talk about the problem of criminal violence. But all their talk never deals with the real solutions—indeed in their unwillingness to end the state's preemption of local gun control laws and their rejection of anti-poverty proposals like an increase in the minimum wage or fair funding of our schools, they reject the most important solutions. They focus on crime not to propose genuine solutions but to convince voters to reject sound ideas and instead embrace police repression and higher rates of incarceration that may sound plausible to people who are scared of crime and believe that hiring police officers and putting more people in jail will protect them. But those policies do not and cannot work at any reasonable cost.

It is hard not to conclude that conservative politicians know that and do not care. For they really do not want them to reduce our high murder rates. They need our extraordinary levels of violence in order to encourage white working and middle class people to embrace public policies that not only make it impossible to reduce poverty but that also reduce the economic well-being of these very same people. And they need to point to murder in a Black majority city, Philadelphia, to tie their fear-mongering to the racist dog whistles that are all too central to discourse in the Trump-dominated Republican party of today.

Republican efforts to investigate and, perhaps, impeach Philadelphia's twice-elected District Attorney Larry Krasner should be seen in this light. That is not to say that Krasner's efforts as District Attorney should be immune to criticism. He has not always explained as well as he might

have how he uses his discretion in charging illegal gun ownership. So it is understandable that there is concern in Philadelphia and beyond that he not been as effective as he might be in reducing the supply of illegal guns on our streets. But his policies recognize what we have documented here: the Philadelphia Police Department and the District Attorney cannot by themselves reduce the murder rate in Philadelphia.<sup>22</sup> Any attempt to massively expand the police to try to do so would take resources that are better spent on reducing poverty. Krasner has rightly chosen not to pursue such policies. But except in small ways, he doesn't have the ability to enact policies that reduce poverty or reduce the number of guns in our city.

So the Republican investigation of Larry Krasner is mostly political theater carried about politicians not serious about the rise in murders in Philadelphia. The investigation are a product of cynicism and hypocrisy on the part of politicians who sacrifice truth and honesty to the pursuit of power.

---

<sup>22</sup> It is important to note that the upsurge in murder has taken place at a time when clearance rates for murder—that is the number of murders for which the police find a likely suspect—has fallen from nearly 80% in the 1980s to 42% in 2015 to 36.7% in 2020 while the clearance rate for homicides of Black people has fallen almost to 30%. (For recent years see Rebecca Rhynhart, Data Release: Gun Violence Clearance and Case Outcomes <https://controller.phila.gov/philadelphia-audits/data-release-gun-violence-trends/> and for the 1980s, Joshua Vaugh, Philly Cops are Solving Fewer Homicides, The Appeal, March 2, 2021 <https://theappeal.org/philly-cops-are-solving-fewer-homicides-the-city-keeps-paying-them-millions/>) There is some reason is has increased in the last year (See Brian Saunders, Philly Police Clearance Rate up 8% .[https://www.phillytrib.com/news/local\\_news/philly-police-case-clearance-rate-up-8/article\\_816f9f96-46e5-53ca-9758-960c0d643983.html](https://www.phillytrib.com/news/local_news/philly-police-case-clearance-rate-up-8/article_816f9f96-46e5-53ca-9758-960c0d643983.html).) A District Attorney is not Batman. He cannot prosecute cases for which the police department has not found a suspect and sufficient evidence with which to prosecute and convict him.

## Appendix: Data Sources

For table 1 we chose the largest cities in the country as well as cities for which 2021 data was more readily available. Sources for 2019 are FBI uniform crime reports 2019 <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019> and Everytown Research & Policy, City Dashboard: Murder and Homicide <https://everytownresearch.org/report/city-data/>. Because FBI uniform crime reports crime reports are released long after the end of a calendar, we had to rely on other sources of data. Much of the 2021 data comes from Arshad Altheimer, Libnah Rodriguez, and Morgan Holland, 2021 Homicide Statistics for 24 U.S. Cities, RIT Center for Public Safety Initiatives. This report relied on searching local police force and news media reports on many cities. We did the same thing for cities not included in this report. Our sources for individual cities are in the following table.

Baltimore, MD	<a href="https://www.wbaltv.com/article/baltimore-more-than-300-homicides-2021/38647379#">https://www.wbaltv.com/article/baltimore-more-than-300-homicides-2021/38647379#</a>
Charlotte, NC	<a href="https://charlottenc.gov/newsroom/cityhighlights/Pages/2021-Crime-Report.aspx">https://charlottenc.gov/newsroom/cityhighlights/Pages/2021-Crime-Report.aspx</a>
Cincinnati, OH	<a href="https://www.wcpo.com/news/local-news/hamilton-county/cincinnati/homicide-rates-in-cincinnati-remain-on-the-rise-since-the-beginning-of-the-pandemic">https://www.wcpo.com/news/local-news/hamilton-county/cincinnati/homicide-rates-in-cincinnati-remain-on-the-rise-since-the-beginning-of-the-pandemic</a>
Houston, TX	<a href="https://www.khou.com/article/news/crime/2021-houston-homicide-numbers/285-53ed3b62-fd67-4c53-b752-2505c601cfd5">https://www.khou.com/article/news/crime/2021-houston-homicide-numbers/285-53ed3b62-fd67-4c53-b752-2505c601cfd5</a>
Kansas City, MO	<a href="https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/crime/article256787082.html">https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/crime/article256787082.html</a>
Las Vegas, NV	<a href="https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/murders-in-2021-increase-las-vegas-area/">https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/murders-in-2021-increase-las-vegas-area/</a>
Memphis, TN	<a href="https://www.actionnews5.com/2022/01/01/memphis-sees-record-342-homicides-2021-ends/">https://www.actionnews5.com/2022/01/01/memphis-sees-record-342-homicides-2021-ends/</a>
Milwaukee, WI	<a href="https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/2022/01/01/milwaukee-totals-197-homicides-2021-according-law-enforcement/9037816002/">https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/2022/01/01/milwaukee-totals-197-homicides-2021-according-law-enforcement/9037816002/</a>
Oklahoma City, OK	<a href="https://okcfox.com/news/local/oklahoma-city-police-department-releases-2021-annual-report-crimes-shootings-murders-arsons-rapes-aggravated-assaults-springlake-in-custody-deaths">https://okcfox.com/news/local/oklahoma-city-police-department-releases-2021-annual-report-crimes-shootings-murders-arsons-rapes-aggravated-assaults-springlake-in-custody-deaths</a>
Phoenix, AZ	<a href="https://www.fox10phoenix.com/news/phoenix-homicides-compared-cities-population#:~:text=Phoenix%20ranks%20third%20on%20this,or%20198%20homicides%20in%202021.">https://www.fox10phoenix.com/news/phoenix-homicides-compared-cities-population#:~:text=Phoenix%20ranks%20third%20on%20this,or%20198%20homicides%20in%202021.</a>
San Francisco, CA	<a href="https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/san-francisco/sf-mayor-police-chief-discuss-citys-crime-over-the-last-year/2790381/">https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/san-francisco/sf-mayor-police-chief-discuss-citys-crime-over-the-last-year/2790381/</a>
Seattle, WA	<a href="https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/Police/Reports/2021_SPD_CRIME_REPORT_FINAL.pdf">https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/Police/Reports/2021_SPD_CRIME_REPORT_FINAL.pdf</a>
Tulsa, OK	<a href="https://tulsaworld.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/2021s-homicides-fewer-in-number-but-greater-in-complexity-detectives-say/article_b55139dc-6f0d-11ec-9169-cf7dd3f5d686.html">https://tulsaworld.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/2021s-homicides-fewer-in-number-but-greater-in-complexity-detectives-say/article_b55139dc-6f0d-11ec-9169-cf7dd3f5d686.html</a>

The county murder data in Table 2 is from the Pennsylvania Uniform Crime Reporting System, <https://www.ucr.pa.gov/PAUCRSPUBLIC/Home/Index>