

**Statement to the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary**

Hearing on: Protecting Our Democracy's Frontline Workers

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***The Case for Serious Violent Crime as an Issue Worthy of an Urgent Federal Response***

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### **About the Author**

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Mr. Mangual has authored and coauthored a number of policy papers, and more than one hundred essays and columns on topics ranging from policing and crime to incarceration and jail violence, among others. His work has been featured in a wide array of publications, including the *Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*.

Rafael holds a B.A. from the City University of New York's Baruch College and a J.D. from DePaul University in Chicago, and he lives in New York City with his wife and their two children.

*\*\*The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research does not take institutional positions on federal, state, or local legislation, rules, or regulations. Although my comments draw upon my research and writing about criminal justice issues as an Institute fellow, my statement to the Subcommittee is solely my own, and should not be construed as my employer's.*

## Statement

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Grassley, and members of the Committee:

I'd like to begin by thanking you for the invitation to address this distinguished body. I'm going to focus my testimony today on what I believe to be an incredibly important issue that warrants a robust federal response: That issue, is the recent rise of serious violent crime.

After peaking in the early 1990s, serious violent crimes like murder, aggravated assault, and robbery declined sharply—gains that held at the national level through the mid-2010s.<sup>1</sup> As I've written elsewhere, what has become known as the Great Crime Decline represents one of the greatest achievements in urban-American history. The decline absolutely transformed my home city of New York into one of the safest, most dynamic, urban centers in the world. Many cities across America saw similar transformations.

Unfortunately, those gains seem to be at risk. In 2015 and 2016, homicides increased by 10.8%<sup>2</sup> and 7.9%<sup>3</sup>, respectively. And, after leveling off for a few years, the nation's homicide rate spiked in 2020 by 30%—which Pew Research reported was the single largest one-year spike since at least 1905, and possibly ever.<sup>4</sup> While a comprehensive national count has not yet been released, indications are that the national homicide rate increased again in 2021.<sup>5</sup>

While 2020 saw the largest *homicide* spike on record, overall index crimes (an aggregation of eight serious crime categories tracked by the FBI<sup>6</sup>) were down, seemingly creating a divergence between homicide, specifically, and crime, generally.<sup>7</sup> However, it is important to note that overall crime measures might have actually masked what was a more serious problem, thanks to the pandemic-driven changes in people's routine activities that caused them to spend less time in public spaces. Indeed, some analysts found that, when controlling for the amount of time people were actually spending outside, the data in some cities revealed that one's *risk* of being victimized actually went *up* in 2020. Analyzing foot traffic, researchers from the University of Pennsylvania and the Naval Postgraduate School found that "people in public spaces were 15-30 percent more likely to be robbed or assaulted."<sup>8</sup> In each of the cities

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2012/crime-in-the-u.s.-2012/tables/1tabledatadecoverviewpdf/table\\_1\\_crime\\_in\\_the\\_united\\_states\\_by\\_volume\\_and\\_rate\\_per\\_100000\\_inhabitants\\_1993-2012.xls](https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2012/crime-in-the-u.s.-2012/tables/1tabledatadecoverviewpdf/table_1_crime_in_the_united_states_by_volume_and_rate_per_100000_inhabitants_1993-2012.xls)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/27/us/murder-crime-fbi.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/fbi-releases-2016-report-crime-united-states>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/10/27/what-we-know-about-the-increase-in-u-s-murders-in-2020/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/22/upshot/murder-rise-2020.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://rccd.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/gsdnvgov/content/About/UCR/FAQsforUCR.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/09/america-having-violence-wave-not-crime-wave/620234/>

<sup>8</sup> [http://maximmassenkoff.com/papers/victimization\\_rate.pdf](http://maximmassenkoff.com/papers/victimization_rate.pdf)

analyzed in that study—New York,<sup>9</sup> Los Angeles,<sup>10</sup> and Chicago<sup>11</sup>—index offenses are up substantially through the first half of July.

Some in the media have cautioned against making too much of recently elevated crime levels by highlighting that, while serious violence did indeed spike in 2020 (and remains elevated today), things were much worse in the early 1990s. While this is true on a national level, it is not true for many of America's major cities: Philadelphia (PA), Louisville (KY), Indianapolis (IN), Columbus (OH), Austin (TX), Tucson (AZ), St. Paul (MN), Portland (OR), Albuquerque (NM), Toledo (OH), Baton Rouge (LA), Rochester (NY), Fayetteville (NC), Milwaukee (WI), and Memphis (TN) all set all-time homicide records in 2021.<sup>12</sup>

Others logged their highest homicide tallies since at least 1990 in 2020. That list includes: Cincinnati (OH), Trenton (NJ), Kansas City (MO), Jacksonville (FL), Denver (CO), Cleveland (OH), Jackson (MS), Wichita (KS), Greensboro (NC), Lansing (MI), and Colorado Springs (CO).<sup>13</sup> St. Louis set a new record for homicide *rate* in 2020.<sup>14</sup> Shreveport (LA), Baltimore (MD), Minneapolis (MN), and Tulsa (OK) came dangerously close to their all-time homicide records in 2020; and, as I wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* late last year, “Chicago, Seattle and Fort Worth, Texas, would all have to go back 25 years to see homicide tallies comparable to what they [were] seeing” then.<sup>15</sup>

As troubling as the statistics I've mentioned thus far may sound, national and citywide crime measures mask an important reality that we should all consider when discussing the issue of serious violent crime: Violent victimization is hyper-concentrated—both geographically and demographically—which means that a very small slice of our country is bearing the brunt of what is among our biggest social problems.

To illustrate this point, consider the following:

- In a given year, somewhere in the range of just 2% of U.S. counties see somewhere in the range of 50% of U.S. murders, while about 60% of U.S. counties don't see a single murder.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/nypd/downloads/pdf/crime\\_statistics/cs-en-us-city.pdf](https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/nypd/downloads/pdf/crime_statistics/cs-en-us-city.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://lapdonlinestrgeacc.blob.core.usgovcloudapi.net/lapdonlinemedia/2022/07/cityprof.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> [https://home.chicagopolice.org/wp-content/uploads/1\\_PDFsam\\_CompStat-Public-2022-Week-30.pdf](https://home.chicagopolice.org/wp-content/uploads/1_PDFsam_CompStat-Public-2022-Week-30.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> See, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/yes-the-crime-wave-is-as-bad-as-you-think-murder-rate-violent-killings-shootings-defund-police-11638988699>, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/yes-the-crime-wave-is-as-bad-as-you-think-murder-rate-violent-killings-shootings-defund-police-11638988699>, and <https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/03/us/homicide-rate-us-statistics/index.html>.

<sup>13</sup> See, *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/missouri/articles/2021-01-03/st-louis-2020-homicide-rate-is-highest-in-50-years>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/articles/yes-the-crime-wave-is-as-bad-as-you-think-murder-rate-violent-killings-shootings-defund-police-11638988699>

<sup>16</sup> <https://crimeresearch.org/2017/04/number-murders-county-54-us-counties-2014-zero-murders-69-1-murder/>

- In my home city of New York, around 5% of street segments see about 50% of all crime, and less than 4% of street segments see approximately 50% of all violent crime<sup>17</sup>—this trend, referred to in the criminological literature as the law of crime concentration has been observed in cities around the world.<sup>18</sup>
- In New York City, a *minimum* of 95% of shooting victims are either black or Hispanic, every single year (going back to at least 2008), despite blacks and Hispanics not constituting anywhere near 95% of the city’s population.<sup>19</sup>
- In Chicago, a recent study of gun violence by the University of Chicago Crime Lab found that blacks constituted 80% of homicide victims, despite constituting just over 29% of the city’s population.<sup>20</sup>
- Nationally, when homicides spiked in 2020, the share of white homicide victims actually *declined* by 2.4 percentage points relative to 2019, while the share of black and Hispanic victims *increased* by 2.2 percentage points.<sup>21</sup>

We live in a world of limited resources. As such, governments must be strategic when deciding whether, and, if so, how much of its resources to dedicate to particular problems. What I’d like to suggest to this Committee is that the problem of violent crime, concentrated as it is in low-income minority communities in and around American cities should be near the top of the list of problems that the U.S. Department of Justice should seek to help control.

Such an effort could take many forms—from investing in more policing at the state and local level,<sup>22</sup> to forming joint task forces dedicated to building cases with local departments to target the most dangerous, highest rate offenders.<sup>23</sup> In 1994, the federal government undertook what was then—and, despite imperfections revealed as time passed, remains—a valiant effort to help stem the tide of serious crime. The lessons learned from that effort, and others that contributed to the Great Crime Decline should be put into practice again today.

Thank you.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.manhattan-institute.org/weisburd-zastrow-crime-hot-spots>

<sup>18</sup>

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276150162> The law of crime concentration and the criminology of place

<sup>19</sup> See, <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/stats/reports-analysis/crime-enf.page>; see also, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/newyorkcitynewyork>.

<sup>20</sup> See, <https://urbanlabs.uchicago.edu/projects/gun-violence-in-chicago-2016>; see also, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/chicagocityillinois>.

<sup>21</sup> Author’s analysis of FBI UCR data. See also, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-02-22/pandemic-murder-wave-fell-most-heavily-on-young-black-men>.

<sup>22</sup> [https://craftmediabucket.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/AVCJReport\\_PolicingPublicSafety\\_Chalfin\\_v3-1.pdf](https://craftmediabucket.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/AVCJReport_PolicingPublicSafety_Chalfin_v3-1.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pam.22323>