

Four Reasons For The Crime Increase

Whenever Anyone Tells You Guns are the Reason for the Rise in Crime, Show Them [This Article](#)

by AMY SWEARER posted on May 21, 2023



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The entirety of the American system of government rests on two very simple yet profound premises—that every human being is endowed by our Creator with natural and unalienable rights, and that the only just end of government is to secure these rights for its citizens. Unfortunately, far too often, ill-considered progressive policies not only fail to adequately secure Americans’ natural rights from criminals who would undermine them, but actively worsen the problem by making it harder for peaceable citizens to defend themselves. Here are four specific policies that routinely make us all less safe and that, after crime rates predictably rise, are then used as excuses from gun-control proponents to further restrict our right to keep and bear arms.

1. Refusing to Prosecute and Punish Violent Offenders

A majority of violent crimes (including crimes involving firearms) are perpetrated by a small and predictable number of serial offenders, many of whom are already legally prohibited from possessing the firearms they use to carry out these crimes. This is true in virtually every major city in the nation, irrespective of differences in geographic location, demographic makeup or local political leanings. One very effective way of combating violent crime, then, is to focus heavily on deterring and incapacitating these serial offenders who are disproportionately responsible for facilitating “gun violence.”

Enter the “progressive prosecutor” movement, a concerted and well-funded effort to essentially do just the opposite. These prosecutors are, in many respects, “non-prosecutors,” who don’t just undermine the rule of law, but actively facilitate lawlessness. Their pro-criminal, anti-victim policies include, among other things: declining to prosecute entire categories of criminal offenses, watering down felonies to misdemeanors, refusing to prosecute juveniles in adult court for homicide or other violent crimes and refusing to add sentence enhancements or allegations to indictment. In cities where progressive prosecutors “go rogue” and decide to simply stop enforcing the law to a meaningful degree, more members of that small subset of serial offenders remain out on the streets instead of in prison or are released back into the community far more quickly than their crimes warranted.

The effects of these progressive “de-prosecution” strategies have been universally and overwhelmingly devastating for public safety. Consider Chicago, which by 2015 had begun making considerable progress against violent crime. In 2016, however, Kim Foxx—a self-described progressive prosecutor endorsed by the local Democrat party—took over as the state’s attorney for Cook County, in which Chicago is located. Almost immediately, residents of the Windy City experienced a stunning increase in crime and saw their years-long trend of public-safety gains entirely swept away.

The same story played out in city after city, as progressive prosecutors strung together a series of victories in major metropolitan areas like Baltimore, Los Angeles, New York City, Philadelphia, San Francisco and St. Louis. Like the antithesis of King Midas and his golden touch, progressive prosecutors exhibit a truly terrifying ability to destroy any city into which they trod. Instead of precious metal, all that's left in their wake is a significant and sustained increase in homicides, shootings, carjackings and other crimes.

One recent study estimated that these progressive “de-prosecution” tactics are directly responsible for hundreds of excess homicides every year, including 70 excess homicides a year in Baltimore, 74 excess homicides a year in Philadelphia and 169 excess homicides a year in Chicago.

2. Releasing Violent Offenders Under Ill-Conceived Bail-Reform Policies

Hand-in-glove with the progressive- prosecutor movement has been a parallel effort in many left-leaning states and major cities to impose dramatic, “progressive” changes with respect to bail policy—that is, for determining which criminal defendants may be released back into the community while awaiting their trials or sentencing, and the conditions under which they may be released. These ill-conceived “reforms” are intentionally designed to increase the number of defendants who are eligible for pre-trial release, and to decrease the likelihood that a defendant won't be able to post bond—most often by mandating inappropriately low bonds, or by eliminating cash bond altogether for many offenses, regardless of the defendant's criminal history.



Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg (D)

In addition to legislative or administrative reforms, some rogue prosecutors go even further by implementing their own intraoffice policies that effectively ensure that dangerous offenders won't be detained for long, if they're detained at all. As Cully Stimson and Zack Smith, two of my Heritage Foundation colleagues, have explained at length in their work on rogue prosecutors, they regularly prohibit their assistant prosecutors from asking for courts to deny bail for many offenders, and often explicitly prioritize and support releasing most defendants with little-to-no bail, at all. Even worse, many—like Chicago's Kim Foxx—routinely refuse to hold defendants accountable when they blatantly violate the terms of their bail or refuse to show up for subsequent court hearings.

In some cases, these overly lenient bail reforms (and their negative consequences) predate the 2020 violent-crime spike. And, as with progressive non-prosecution strategies, it would also be too simplistic to suggest that these bail reforms alone are responsible for that crime spike. But there is, nonetheless, ample reason to believe that progressive bail reform, together with progressive non-prosecution strategies, formed a toxic combination that greatly exacerbated—and continues to greatly exacerbate—the nation's violent-crime wave by creating a “perfect storm” for unchecked violence.

As just one example, in 2017, Cook County, Ill.—which includes Chicago—implemented new liberal bail policies. According to one study, in the years following these reforms, 45% more defendants released on bail were charged with committing new crimes compared to prior years, while 33% more defendants released on bail were charged with committing new *violent* crimes.

Data from CWBChicago, a crowd-funded local crime news outlet in the Windy City that tracks publicly available information on violent crimes committed by defendants while they're released on bond pending felony charges, underscores this reality. Since 2020, Chicago defendants released on bail with pending felony charges have been directly accused of committing nearly 100 murders and 115 attempted murders. Last year alone, 56 people released on felony bail in Chicago were subsequently arrested for killing 25 victims, attempting to kill 52 victims (including four police officers), and using a firearm to commit aggravated battery against another five victims.

Given that, since 2017, Chicago prosecutors have brought charges against a suspect in only 33% of homicide cases and in fewer than 5% of non-fatal shooting cases, it is almost a statistical certainty that defendants on felony bail have committed more violent crimes than the ones for which they had originally been arrested and charged.

The problem is not limited to Chicago, either. Consider New York, which in 2020 implemented a slew of progressive criminal-justice “reforms,” including a significant overhaul of its bail policies. By 2022, New York City experienced a more than 30% increase in the number of violent felonies committed every month by individuals released on bail. The same is true in every city where progressive prosecutors—sometimes in tandem with progressive policymakers—work far harder to ensure that criminals are coddled than to protect the public from those criminals.

3. Demoralizing, Defunding and Hamstringing Police Departments

Law-enforcement officers play a key role in deterring, interrupting and investigating violent crimes so that offenders may be swiftly identified and brought to justice; however, when it comes to officers-per-capita and officers-per-homicide, Americans are significantly under-policed compared to the rest of the developed world. In recent years, this problem is increasingly aggravated by progressive-led calls for policing “reform.” As with liberal reforms on prosecuting criminals and releasing them on bail, progressive policing “reforms” are, in reality, largely calls to hamstring law enforcement’s ability to enforce any laws or identify, locate and detain people who break them.

To a substantial degree in many cities, these anti-police crusaders have gotten their wish. In recent years, several major cities cut vacant job openings within police departments, disbanded specialized units that focused on combating gun crime and began shifting funds from police departments to other social services. At the same time, high-profile and widespread efforts to demonize law enforcement led to higher rates of officer retirement and resignation and lowered recruitment rates to fill the rapidly depleting ranks of departments that were already understaffed.

As one might imagine, when police departments are understaffed, underfunded and experiencing low morale, the public suffers. In recent years, police response times have skyrocketed in many cities, even for the highest-priority calls, like those where a victim’s life is actively endangered. This is obviously detrimental to victims of violent crime, who are less likely to see law enforcement officers arrive in time to effectively intervene and who are more likely to sustain serious injuries the longer they wait for help to arrive. Higher response times also decrease the likelihood that a suspect will be arrested for the crime. This is partly because the suspect is less likely to be on the scene when officers arrive, but also because response times play a significant role in the public’s overall trust in the police. Witnesses and victims are less likely to cooperate with investigations when they don’t believe that officers will be able to keep them safe from retaliatory violence. All of this, in turn, decreases the already low likelihood in many cities that any particular offender will be quickly caught and sanctioned, and increases the willingness of would-be offenders to engage in criminal activity because they (reasonably) believe they can do so with impunity.

It’s not just response times that are impacted. Proactive, officer-initiated law-enforcement initiatives are precisely the type of policing designed to disrupt patterns of violence, particularly many types of violence by armed offenders. But these are also the tactics that have been scaled back the most as a result of both anti-police rhetoric and because officers of understaffed departments are simply engaged in reactive policing [i.e., handling normal call volumes] to spend significant amounts of time engaged in active policing. Moreover, when departments are understaffed and overworked, there are fewer officers available to investigate crimes and pinpoint suspects for the diminishing number of prosecutors still willing to seek meaningful punishment. And those who are available may be left doing the jobs of multiple officers, or may be pulled away from investigations to deal with higher-priority calls when resources are spread thin.



4. Imposing Significant Burdens on the Second Amendment Rights of Peaceable Citizens

Not only do progressive criminal-justice policies increase the likelihood that peaceable Americans will become victims of violent crime, but at the same time, many progressives support widespread gun-control policies that undermine the ability of law-abiding citizens to defend themselves from these criminals. At the heart of the Second Amendment’s right to keep and bear arms is the natural, unalienable right to self-defense. While we can and should rely on professional law enforcement when practicable, we do not simply cede our right to self-defense to the government when law enforcement can’t or won’t be there in time to defend us.

When ordinary people are empowered to defend themselves with firearms, they can—and routinely do—just that. According to almost every major study on the issue, Americans use firearms to defend themselves and others somewhere between 500,000 and several million times a year. While gun-control advocates routinely balk at these numbers, even the notoriously anti-gun Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has acknowledged that this is the state of the evidence. And in 2021, the most-comprehensive survey of gun ownership and gun use ever conducted vindicated earlier studies, with the collected data indicating an annual estimate of roughly 1.6 million defensive gun uses by civilians. Importantly, lawful gun owners are not the driving force behind violent crime. The overwhelming majority of America’s tens of millions of lawful gun owners will never use their firearms to harm themselves or others.

Despite this, progressive gun-control advocates routinely seek to impose a wide array of financial, time and practical barriers between peaceable Americans and their right to armed self-defense, as well as to severely restrict the places in which they may defend themselves and which firearms they may use. Perversely, these restrictive policies may help facilitate criminal violence. Not only are many criminals (particularly would-be mass public murderers) incentivized to attack victims in spaces where they quite reasonably believe their victims will be unarmed, but the expansive use of “gun-free zones” means lawful gun owners will, on an increased basis, be required to leave their firearms unattended in their homes or in their vehicles instead of on their person, where the firearms are far less likely to be stolen.

The government exists to secure our natural rights. Americans want and deserve to feel like their elected officials are invested in doing just that. But our rights will never be truly secure as long as rogue prosecutors are more interested in coddling criminals than in protecting the public, or for as long as progressive gun-control advocates treat peaceable gun owners with dripping disdain. It’s time to move on from these policies that put us all in danger.

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