



CHAPTER
6

PUBLIC SAFETY

IDEA 8

Public safety is the highest priority. We need to fix the criminal justice system so career criminals can't keep committing crimes.

In communities large and small, urban and rural, red and blue, Americans are worried about the surge in crime.

They are right to be. Motor vehicle theft incidents increased 59 percent from 2019 to 2022 in 35 cities of various sizes. In 2021, there were 26,031 reported homicides, a 56 percent spike compared to 2019, while the aggravated assault rate rose by 12 percent from 2019 to 2020.

Although crime in America hasn't reached the epidemic levels seen in the past—violent crime is still down 44 percent since the 1990s, for example—it is unequivocally on the rise in far too many places across America.

Crime is a scourge anywhere, but the heaviest burden falls on low-income communities and people of color. To cite just one example, although Black Americans are just 14 percent of the population, they represent 32 percent of all violent crime victims and 54 percent of homicide victims.

One major driver of crime in American communities is the career criminals who victimize people over and over. A 2021 study by the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform estimated that roughly 500 people are responsible for driving up to 70 percent of all gun violence in Washington, DC. And New York City's police department reported that nearly a third of all shoplifting cases in the city in 2022 involved just 327 people who collectively were arrested and rearrested more than 6,000 times.

Crime in America is increasingly organized and directed across state and country lines too.

According to some estimates, gangs are responsible for 75 percent of violent crime in Atlanta and the majority of shootings in New York City. Meanwhile, the leading suppliers of fentanyl, heroin, and methamphetamine in the US are all international drug cartels, contributing to the hundreds of thousands of overdose deaths in America in recent years. Even shoplifting is becoming organized now. "Organized retail crime" features sophisticated operations where teams will steal from stores and then sell the goods online, on the black market, or internationally, costing the US economy over \$100 billion and nearly 700,000 jobs in 2021.

Unfortunately, some local district attorneys haven't been enforcing the law with the rigor required to keep career criminals off the streets. In other instances, well-intentioned bail reform efforts that sought to address a real problem (innocent people being kept in jail because they didn't have enough money to post bail) have in practice prevented judges from detaining dangerous criminal suspects or habitual offenders.

These enforcement problems need to be solved mostly at the state and local level, but our next president should ensure the Justice Department and federal law enforcement agencies focus on and put more resources behind disrupting organized crime and coordinating more closely with state and local law enforcement.

IDEA 9

America needs more and better community policing to keep people safe.

It's a simple equation: the more cops patrolling a given community, the less crime that community experiences. A 2021 study found that a 10 percent decrease in police presence results in a 7 percent increase in crime and adding a single police officer to a city can prevent anywhere from 0.06 to 0.1 homicides, meaning that as few as 10 extra cops can save a life that would otherwise be cut short.

But our nation's police departments are facing a desperate shortage of manpower, in part due to pressure from activists to defund police departments and to difficulty recruiting qualified candidates.

But good policing goes beyond manpower. Local police departments need to do more to win the community trust effective policing is built on. Local citizens need to feel like the police are there to protect them, not prey on them, and community policing needs to be practiced with the same spirit of constructive engagement in Harlem as it is in the Hamptons.

Current police training models are often misfocused, too short, and out of alignment with both community safety priorities and research about what works to minimize bias and use of force. Seventy-one percent of police agencies surveyed by the Police Executive Research Forum in a

2020 study devoted less than 5 percent of their total budget to recruit training, which is why US police officers get many fewer hours of training, on average, than those in other developed countries. Smart training programs that emphasize de-escalation and stress recognition have been linked to significant declines in use-of-force incidents, officer injuries, and citizen complaints.

This kind of smart, well-funded, effective officer training is still in too short supply. So too are actual police officers. Dallas is short by 550 officers, Atlanta is looking for another 250, and Seattle needs another 100 detectives.

Washington could help by providing more funding to help localities hire and retain police and invest in effective training.

Another compelling idea: the federal government could consider establishing police service academies in line with military academies like West Point to ensure the best of the best are being sent to help patrol our communities.

IDEA 10

Americans have a constitutional right to own guns, but society also has a responsibility to keep dangerous weapons away from dangerous people.

Americans have always had the right to bear arms, and most Americans today support Second Amendment rights.

But Washington has also long exercised the right to put reasonable limits on gun ownership, beginning with the National Firearms Act of 1934, which outlawed the machine guns that organized crime members were using to cause mayhem on American streets.

In 2021, nearly 49,000 Americans lost their lives to firearms, a level of carnage unparalleled in any other developed country. Two commonsense measures can make a difference.

One measure would prohibit gun purchases among people under 21. Young people are the most likely victims and perpetrators of gun violence in America, especially the mass shootings that terrify every American parent. Research has shown that more 18 and 19-year-olds are arrested for homicide than people of any other ages, and

scientists' growing knowledge of the brain tells us that full mental maturity isn't reached until the mid-twenties, yet our laws permit individuals to purchase potent weapons like AR-15 rifles as early as age 18. A "No Gun Purchases Under 21" law wouldn't bar parents from buying guns for their children and could include exceptions for any head of household under 21 or members of the US military or public safety employees. But raising the age for gun purchases can save lives.

The second measure would be to enable universal background checks by closing the notorious gun show loophole to ensure all firearms are sold with the same level of scrutiny required for licensed gun dealers. Right now, nearly a quarter of all firearms in the US are purchased without a background check. Washington also needs to close another significant gap in the federal background check system known as the Charleston Loophole. Under existing law, gun purchases can proceed automatically after three business days if a federal background check has not been completed. But in 2015, a mass murderer killed nine people at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, with a handgun he purchased after the three-day waiting period, but before his federal background check could be completed. Had the background check been completed, he would not have been able to purchase a gun because he had a previous drug conviction. There is already bipartisan support in Congress for legislation that would close the Charleston loophole by requiring 10 days to complete a federal background check instead of three.

Universal background checks have been shown to reduce homicides by approximately 15 percent in states where they've been implemented. Considering that over 26,000 people died by homicide in the US in 2022, that works out to nearly 4,000 people who might still be alive today if America had universal background checks.