

June 2016

MI

ISSUE BRIEF
State and Local Policy

POVERTY AND PROGRESS IN NEW YORK IX

Crime Trends in Public Housing, 2015–16

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Executive Summary

When New York Mayor Bill de Blasio assumed office in January 2014, he promised to “take dead aim at the Tale of Two Cities . . . [and] put an end to economic and social inequalities that threaten to unravel the city we love.”¹ The Manhattan Institute’s series “Poverty and Progress in New York” tracks the effects of his policies on lower-income New Yorkers.² This report, the ninth installment, updates our analysis of the Mayor’s Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety (MAP),³ an initiative to reduce crime in public housing.

Crime in the city’s public-housing developments has been on an upward trend since 2006. In response, MAP—announced in July 2014—funds a combination of CCTV cameras, increased police presence, new streetlights, and extended community-center hours in 15 high-priority New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments.⁴ In March of this year, NYCHA announced that MAP streetlights would be expanded to 40 other developments, in a manner that will enable rigorous evaluation of different lighting treatments—consistent with the type of pilot experiments recommended in this series.⁵

FINDINGS

Overall, crime in the city’s public-housing developments trended up in the first five months of 2016. MAP’s share of NYCHA crime did *not*. That’s the good news. The bad news is that previous declines in crime in MAP developments have stalled. Specifically:

- MAP developments’ share of NYCHA’s violent crime remains at last year’s 17 percent, in contrast to the decline from 20 percent to 17 percent from 2014 to 2015.
- The absolute numbers of murder, rape, robbery, burglary, and car theft in MAP developments went up in the first five months of 2016—meaning that the measures undertaken by MAP have not sheltered the 15 developments from the rise in these crimes across NYCHA properties.

However, there are two reasons for optimism:

- Shootings are down 43 percent in MAP developments, far more than the 4 percent decline in the rest of the city’s public housing.
- Total index crime is down 3 percent in MAP developments so far this year, but up 7.2 percent in the rest of the city’s public housing.⁶



I. Introduction

While crime in New York City overall fell sharply during 2006–15, crime in public housing has, after a decline from 2006–09, returned to 2006 levels. Relative to the rest of the city, in other words, New York’s public-housing projects are more dangerous now than they were a decade ago. As crime continues to fall in the city as a whole this year⁷ but continues to rise within NYCHA, this gap grows wider.

The original rollout of MAP included 15 housing developments; since then, Mayor de Blasio’s administration has undertaken other safety initiatives. Temporary streetlights, for example, will be fully deployed in 40 additional public-housing developments by the end of 2016.

Permanent lighting improvements in the 15 MAP developments will be completed incrementally through 2019, and the installation of “layered-access security”—electronic key fobs, camera-linked intercoms, remote monitoring of electronic lock status, and redundant mechanical locks in case of vandalism—is in process.⁸ Additional CCTV cameras are being installed throughout NYCHA developments.⁹

The gradual spread of what might be called “MAP-lite” measures in other public-housing properties (a partial rollout of lighting and cameras but no additional police presence or community-center hours) complicates any analysis of the relative effectiveness of specific anticrime measures in the original 15 MAP developments. Nonetheless, comparing the crime trends in the 15 MAP properties with the trends in the 319 other NYCHA developments provides a high-level view of how well the most intensive MAP safety measures are working.

II. Findings

When the city announced MAP, the 15 targeted developments had about 16 percent of the NYCHA population but experienced nearly 20 percent of its violent crime.¹⁰ Moreover, violent crime in public housing overall was high compared with the rest of the city. The NYCHA domiciled 5 percent of the city’s population but was home to 15 percent of the murders and 10 percent of the assaults and rapes.¹¹

MAP developments’ share of violent crime in the NYCHA fell from 18.3 percent in 2014 (January 1–November 30) to 16.6 percent in 2015 (January 1–November 30).¹² This is nearly at par with MAP developments’ 16 percent share of the public-housing population. The implication is that the program closed the violent crime gap with the rest of the NYCHA—a positive first step.

Unfortunately, MAP’s share of violent crime in the NYCHA in the first five months of 2016, 16.9 percent, is roughly the same as the 16.6 percent share reached in November 2015. More ominously, the total number of violent crimes in MAP developments has risen, even as the share of violent crimes in the NYCHA is stable.

Figure 1 charts crime trends in MAP vs. non-MAP housing properties, and the highlighting corresponds to relative progress. Major crimes in MAP developments are highlighted in green when they declined more (rose less) than the rest of the NYCHA developments, and highlighted in red when the major crime percentages declined less (rose more) than in the other NYCHA developments. For example, the 3 percent decline of robberies in MAP is nonetheless highlighted in red because the decline in non-MAP developments exceeded the decline in MAP developments. In the NYCHA column, highlighting reflects absolute progress: increases in red, decreases in green.

Relative Progress of MAP Properties vs. Overall Public Housing

FIGURE 1.

	2015: January 1–May 29 2016: January 1–May 29	MAP Properties	Other NYCHA Developments
Murder	2016	4	17
	2015	0	16
	CH %	-	6%
Rape	2016	15	57
	2015	10	46
	CH %	50%	24%
Robbery	2016	68	342
	2015	70	376
	CH %	-3%	-9%
Felony Assault	2016	141	699
	2015	137	628
	CH %	3%	11%
Burglary	2016	27	147
	2015	17	117
	CH %	59%	26%
Grand Larceny	2016	42	360
	2015	60	315
	CH %	-30%	14%
Grand Larceny Auto	2016	11	41
	2015	6	40
	CH %	83%	3%
Shooting Incidents	2016	8	55
	2015	14	57
	CH %	-43%	-4%
Total Index	2016	308	1,663
	2015	300	1,538
	CH %	3%	8%

Source: NYPD

Figure 2 compares MAP’s share of index crimes versus its share of NYCHA population. Red highlighting shows where relative progress has reversed since YTD 2015 (January 1–May 29), and green highlighting shows where it has continued or stabilized versus this time last year. The MAP share of a crime is proportionate to its population vis-à-vis the rest of NYCHA—or “at par,” in colloquial terms—when it equals 16 percent. Below 16 percent, the crime is disproportionately lower than the rest of NYCHA; above 16 percent, the crime is disproportionately higher. The violent crime subtotal is highlighted in bold.

Murder is up inside MAP developments, from zero in 2015 to four in the first five months of 2016. However, the simultaneous decline in shootings, from 14 to eight, provides some measure of hope for the future—more people died, but fewer people were shot. Over time, reducing the number of shootings should, all other things being equal, bring down the murder rate. Nonetheless, any rise in the murder rate is unwelcome.

MAP Developments’ Share of Index Crimes Relative to Population Share

FIGURE 2:

		2015: January 1–May 29 2016: January 1–May 29	MAP Share of Crime	MAP Share of NYCHA Population
Murder	2016		19%	16%
	2015		0%	16%
Rape	2016		21%	16%
	2015		18%	16%
Robbery	2016		17%	16%
	2015		16%	16%
Felony Assault	2016		17%	16%
	2015		18%	16%
Violent Subtotal	2016		17%	16%
	2015		17%	16%
Burglary	2016		16%	16%
	2015		13%	16%
Grand Larceny	2016		10%	16%
	2015		16%	16%
Grand Larceny Auto	2016		21%	16%
	2015		13%	16%
Shooting Incidents	2016		13%	16%
	2015		20%	16%
Total Index	2016		16%	16%
	2015		16%	16%

Source: NYPD

III. Conclusion

Halfway through this year, MAP developments have maintained the relative progress achieved last year in their share of NYCHA’s violent crime—but the number of crimes is up in these developments, as it is across the board in city public housing. Still, it is troubling that progress against violent crime in MAP housing developments has leveled out.

Outside MAP developments, it is discouraging to see a rising crime trend despite the partial rollout of “MAP-lite” investment in streetlights and CCTV cameras. Until deployment is finished, however, it remains too early to make any further judgments.

Nevertheless, the success of the New York Police Department and the NYCHA in checking total index crime rates in MAP properties is an achievement amid a nationwide urban crime wave. Among many other examples,¹³ violent crime has risen significantly in Chicago this year, with more than a thousand wounded and hundreds killed in the first half of the year.¹⁴ Baltimore homicides continue at last year’s extreme levels.¹⁵

Those NYCHA residents outside the Mayor’s Action Plan developments may find little solace in this report, given the upswing in crimes where they live. Yet some help is gradually on the way. MAP-lite investments in streetlights and CCTVs are ongoing, and New York City’s research partnership with University of Chicago’s Crime Lab is continuing its evaluation of the incremental impacts of MAP on crime (with access to the administrative data necessary to do a detailed causal analysis). When the full results come in (and if relative progress in MAP accelerates again), they will provide a road map for scaling up the investments necessary to improve the safety of public-housing residents.

A lot is riding on these policy experiments: if lights, cameras, and cops can’t protect our most vulnerable citizens from violent crime, the only arrows left in the proverbial quiver are more intrusive—though not as intrusive as being robbed, raped, or shot. Intuition suggests that appropriate and well-targeted use of “stop, question, and frisk” physically removes guns from the streets by sheer force and deters their carriage in the first place. Evidence from the NYPD’s Operation Impact (which deployed extra police on the streets of high-crime areas to conduct more intensive street stops) demonstrates that targeted stops, when well justified, generate more gun seizures and have a positive impact on total index crime—robbery and burglary, in particular.¹⁶

These benefits must be weighed against the challenge of implementing the policy in a way that does not undermine local trust and cooperation with the NYPD in high-crime neighborhoods. The city has already cut stops dramatically from the Bloomberg years, focused on reducing poorly targeted stops,¹⁷ and continued cutting even from 2014 to 2015.¹⁸ In early June of this year, the NYPD’s federal monitor proposed even further curtailment of the remaining practice on NYCHA premises.¹⁹ In light of rising crime in the housing developments, this may not be wise.

Endnotes

- ¹ See <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/02/nyregion/complete-text-of-bill-de-blasios-inauguration-speech.html>.
- ² Some language herein may be identical to that published in previous MI publications in this series.
- ³ See <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/336-14/fact-sheet-making-new-york-city-s-neighborhoods-housing-developments-safer#/0>. “Crime Trends in Public Housing, 2006–2015,” MI’s previous report on this issue, abbreviated the mayor’s safety plan as “APNS”; the city refers to the program as “MAP.”
- ⁴ Boulevard, Brownsville, Bushwick, Butler, Castle Hill, Ingersoll, Patterson, Polo Grounds, Queensbridge, Red Hook, St. Nicholas, Stapleton, Tompkins, Van Dyke, and Wagner.
- ⁵ See <http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/alex-armlovich-bill-de-blasio-bright-idea-article-1.2564982>.
- ⁶ The major index crimes include murder, rape, robbery, felony assault, burglary, grand larceny, and grand larceny auto. Shootings are reported in the CompStat charts for analytical convenience but are not part of the sum total of major crimes. The weekly CompStat data used in this report was retrieved from http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/html/crime_prevention/crime_statistics.shtml on June 3rd, 2016. NYPD does not archive the weekly reports, but the specific data used herein is available upon request.
- ⁷ See <http://nyslant.com/article/editorial/a-tale-of-two-cities-new-york-vs.-chicago.html>.
- ⁸ See <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/242-16/mayor-de-blasio-pioneering-study-how-outdoor-lighting-reduces-crime>.
- ⁹ See <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nycha/about/press/pr-2016/polo-grounds-20160310.page>.
- ¹⁰ See <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/336-14/fact-sheet-making-new-york-city-s-neighborhoods-housing-developments-safer#/0>.
- ¹¹ See <https://www.manhattan-institute.org/sites/default/files/IB-AA-1115.pdf>.
- ¹² “Poverty and Progress in New York VI: Crime Trends in Public Housing, 2006–2015,” <https://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/poverty-and-progress-new-york-vi-crime-trends-public-housing-2006-2015-8094.html>.
- ¹³ See <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/14/us/murder-rates-cities-fbi.html>.
- ¹⁴ See <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/06/04/us/chicago-shootings.html>; and <http://heyjackass.com/category/2016-stats>.
- ¹⁵ See <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/crime/bal-baltimore-crime-numbers-q1-2016-story.html>.
- ¹⁶ The analysis also found that poorly targeted stops, judged by the justification listed by the officer (e.g., “furtive movements”), did not bring down crime; see <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2614058>.
- ¹⁷ See <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nypd-issues-new-stop-and-frisk-rules-article-1.2136122>.
- ¹⁸ See http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/html/analysis_and_planning/stop_question_and_frisk_report.shtml.
- ¹⁹ See <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nyc-crime/nypd-monitor-proposes-new-stop-frisk-reforms-article-1.2655736>.