



# *City of SYRACUSE*

# *VIOLENT CRIME*

# *ASSESSMENT*

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# 1. Introduction and Problem Definition

On a warm summer night, Christopher Ayala-Pizarro, Angel Rosario, Jariel Pinet, and Jonathan Sánchez approached a crowd of hundreds on the North side of Syracuse. Without any warning or reason, they sprayed 44 bullets into the mass of young people enjoying the evening. Draquan McDonald, who had no relation or conflict with these four young men, got hit by the gunfire and perished that night.

When Draquan’s sister heard about his death, she suffered a heart attack, despite having no previous heart conditions. His father suffered a stroke a month later and lost his ability to work or walk. Christopher, Angel, Jariel, and Jonathan were convicted to spend decades in prison. Six lives were forever ruined, and five families were scarred for life.<sup>1</sup>

This tragic incident perfectly illustrates the senseless violence that has affected Syracuse over the last decades. With nine hundred and forty-five (945) aggravated assaults and twenty-nine (20) murders in 2021 and an average of twenty-four murders per year in the previous two decades, Syracuse is a city with high levels of violent crime and one of the most violent in New York State. Its 2021 murder rate of 19.85 per 100,000 inhabitants is three times that of the United States (6.52). Despite different interventions from government agencies, and its non-profit network over the last decade, the city continues to have high levels of violence that are heavily concentrated in specific sectors and communities and driven by gang activity, personal disputes, and firearms use.

Using information collected from city and law enforcement databases, twenty-six interviews with stakeholders, twenty-five research papers and books, and several articles, official documents, and public information, this assessment is an effort to understand the causes and factors that drive the city’s high levels of violence.

Applying the Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation approach<sup>2</sup>, this document defines this problem and deconstructs it into thirty-one different root causes. All in all, these root causes are grouped into three general causes: 1) Law enforcement activity is not able to prevent enough criminal

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<sup>1</sup> Dowty, “‘Absolutely Unbelievable’ Violence Leads Syracuse Judge to Compare City to Wild West.”

<sup>2</sup> Samji et al., “PDIA Toolkit: A DIY Approach to Solving Complex Problems.”

behavior. 2) Continuous conflicts between gang and associated individuals and groups of young people that spiral into violence, and 3) Persistent violent and criminal dynamics in twelve areas in the city. The analysis deconstructs these general elements into different sub-causes, from legal institutions to socioeconomic and urbanistic factors.

This assessment is a collective effort to frame and understand an incredibly complex and intractable problem. Ultimately, this document intends to provide valuable and actionable information to initiate a constructive dialogue that allows Syracusans to develop collective solutions to this challenge.

## **2. Description and Scope of the Problem**

### **2.1 Description of violent crime in Syracuse**

Syracuse has high levels of violent crime that have increased over the last decade. Four hundred and forty individuals were murdered between 2001 and 2021. Over this period, the city had an average of 21 homicides per year. Nonetheless, as shown in figure 1, the yearly average and number of homicides have risen since 2012. Between 2001 and 2011, the annual mean was 18.1 per year, whereas between 2012 and 2021, the yearly average rose 26.5% to 22.9.

Aggravated assaults had a somewhat similar tendency. As shown in Figure 2, these crimes dropped from 2005 to 2017. However, since 2019 they have risen continually, going back to high historical levels in 2020 (916 assaults) and 2021 (945 assaults). Since 2017, the annual number of aggravated assaults has increased by 48%.

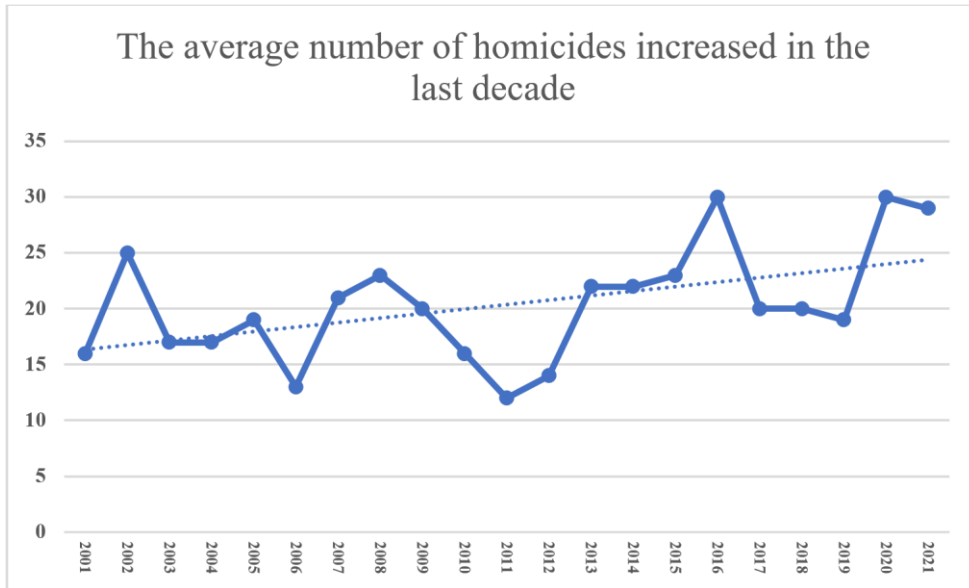


Figure 1. The number of homicides 2001-2021.<sup>3</sup>

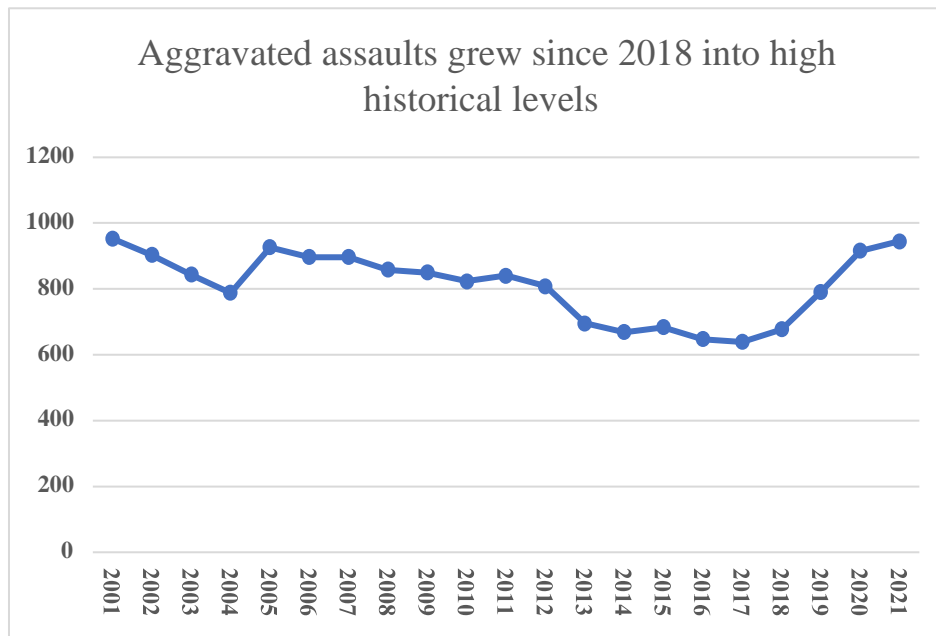


Figure 2. The number of aggravated assaults between 2001-2021<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Syracuse Police Department, “Annual Reports at Syracuse Police Department - Syracuse, NY 13202.”

<sup>4</sup> Syracuse Police Department.

Motivations: Over the last ten years, violent crime has been driven mainly by gang activity<sup>5</sup> and personal disputes<sup>6</sup>. As shown in figure 3, 64% of homicides were related to these two categories. However, there have been variations over the years; gang-related homicides have represented between 23% and 50% of the total number of homicides in any given year, whereas disputes were between 15% and 42%. All in all, gang activity is the main factor driving violent crime in the city, particularly in the last two years when it produced 47% and 50% of homicides.

Weapons and categories: firearms were used in 73% of homicides in the last ten years. Furthermore, this weapon was used in 79% of homicides in the previous five years. This makes them, by far, the most employed weapon in Syracuse's violent crime. Also, almost all gang and drug-related homicides were committed with guns. On the other hand, personal disputes and domestic violence-related homicides were committed with guns, knives, and other weapons in similar proportions. A relevant difference that demands distinctive responses.

It is essential to note that gangs and affiliated individuals and drug trafficking are critical factors in gun violence: almost all drug and gang-related homicides were committed with guns, and most of the last decade's gun homicides were drug and gang-related. According to the Central New York Crime Analysis Center (CNYCAC)<sup>6</sup>, there's a relation between illegal drug trafficking and the possession and use of firearms by gangs or individuals involved in this activity. However, there's a broad consensus among Syracuse's Community Violence Interrupters (CVIs) that homicides between gang members are driven by personal conflicts and feuds between competing gangs or groups. Academic research supports the CVIs' hypothesis<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, drug trafficking could be a risk factor regarding gun violence but not the leading cause.

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<sup>5</sup> According to the Central New York Crime Analysis Center, A gang is an ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, which have a common identifying, sign, symbol, name, interest, and/or activity and who individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal activity or delinquent conduct. Therefore, a homicide committed in the context of these groups' activities is categorized as gang-related. <sup>6</sup> A personal dispute is an interpersonal conflict between two or more individuals. For example, a fight over excessive noise between two neighbors that results in a murder is categorized as a personal dispute homicide.

<sup>6</sup> Syracuse Police Department et al., "GIVE IX Question/Response Requirements."

<sup>8</sup> Rubinstein et al., "Blood in the Rust Belt."

Gangs and personal disputes are the main motives behind Syracuse's homicides

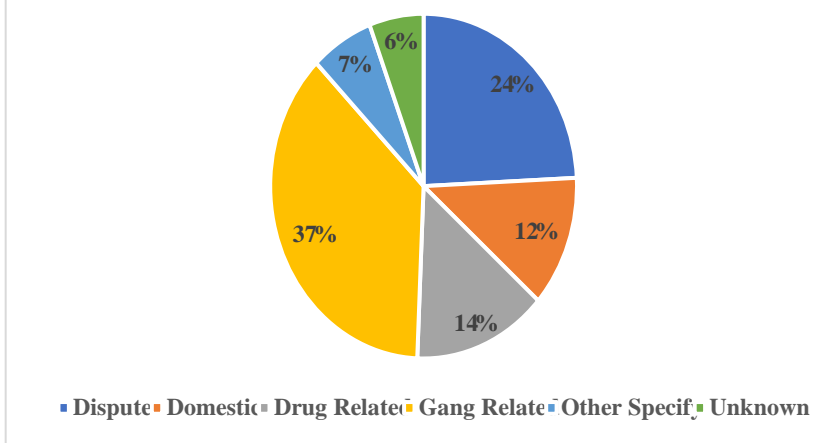


Figure 3. Percentage of homicides by motive, 2012-2021.

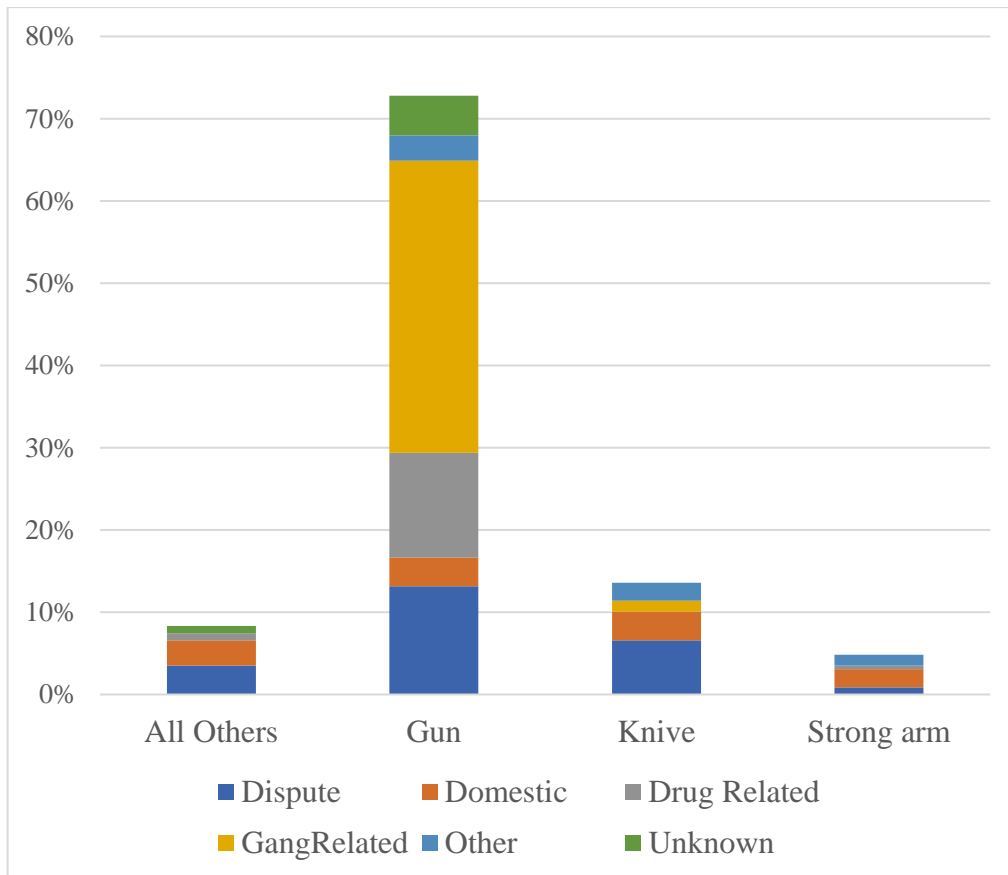


Figure 4. Percentage of homicides by weapon and category, 2012-2021.

Places: Over the last decade, homicides have been highly concentrated in a few areas, predominantly located on the southwest, west, and north sides of Syracuse, as Figure 5 shows. The CNYCAC has grouped these hot spots into eleven ‘POP’ areas, where most of the state, county, and city’s anti-gun violence efforts have been concentrated. Regarding the characteristics of these places, these have more rental units, vacant housing, single-parent households, and a higher African American and Hispanic population than the rest of the city<sup>7</sup>.

More importantly, the hot spots of homicide coincide with the areas of influence of gang members, as shown in Figure 6, which reinforces the importance of gang activity as a factor driving violence in the city.

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<sup>7</sup> Larsen et al., “Spatio-Temporal Patterns of Gun Violence in Syracuse, New York 2009-2015.”



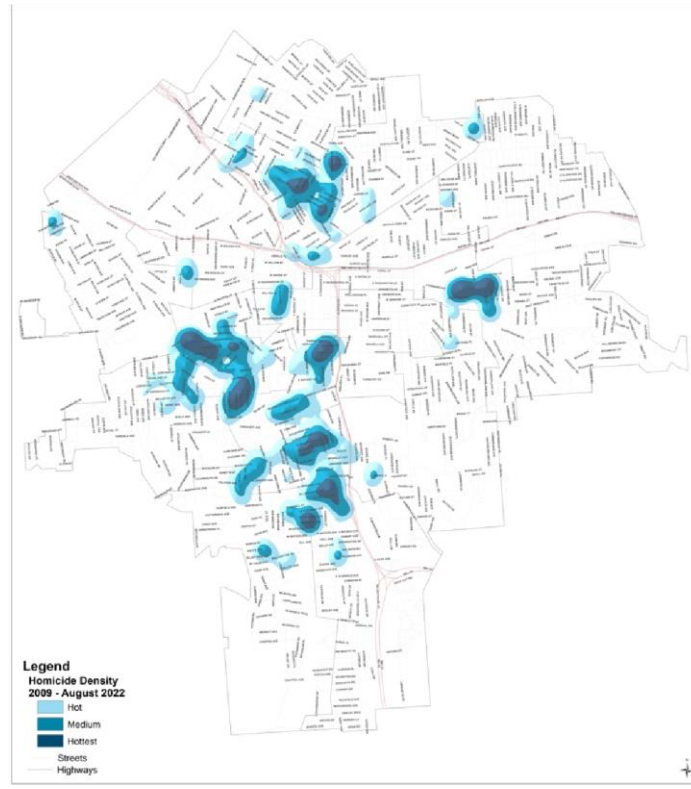


Figure 5. City of Syracuse Homicide Density. Source: Central New York Crime Analysis Center.

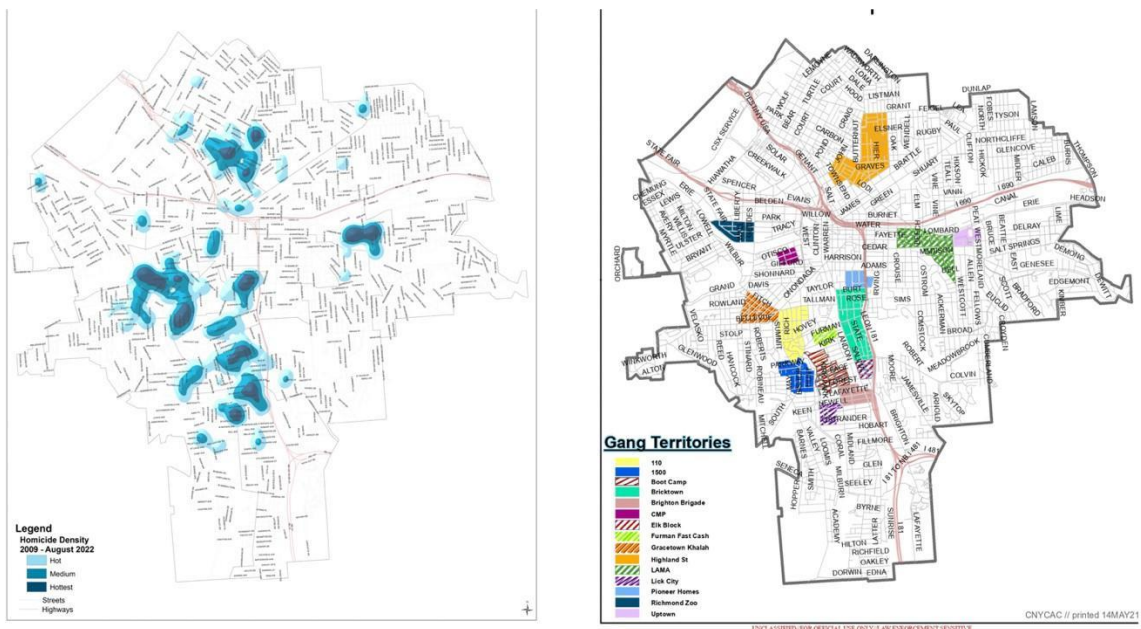


Figure 6. Hot Spots of Violence vs. Gang Territories. Source: Central New York Crime Analysis Center.

## **2.2 City's response to the problem:**

Over the last decade, Syracuse's different stakeholders have tried a diverse set of interventions to tackle its high levels of violence. These initiatives have explored the spectrum of approaches to violent crime, from pure deterrence and incapacitation to a combination of outreach and violence interruption. Many of these are inspired by evidence-based policies that delivered results in other cities. However, as the city's rising crime rates show, the violent crime problem remains unsolved and has worsened over the last ten years.

Following is a description of these initiatives. This memo will explore them further in the other sections.

TRUCE: An US Department of Justice-funded policy implemented from 2013 to 2016. It concentrated law enforcement efforts involving the city's gangs while coupling these with social services programs to help members take a non-violent life path<sup>8</sup>. This program tried to follow the best practices learned from Cincinnati's (OH) successful experience with focused deterrence. However, its coalition of agencies and stakeholders suffered several problems in the implementation stage. Mainly, they couldn't follow through with promises of immediate prosecutions after violent acts and provided little to no social services to very few gang members. After three years of implementation, this policy showed mixed results and was discontinued<sup>11</sup>.

Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) prosecutions: Since 2003, the SPD has cooperated with the U.S. Attorney's Office to prosecute successfully over one hundred members of Syracuse's gangs using the RICO Act. The last of these actions were executed between October 2018, when SPD completed the investigations and arrests, and October 2019, when the prosecution ended with a favorable decision. This strategy pursued strong deterrence and incapacitation of top violent offenders. At its height (2011-2012), homicides in Syracuse were reduced to their lowest levels in 20 years.

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<sup>8</sup> Syracuse Police Office of Public Information, "Press Release: Truce Project Launched in the City of Syracuse." <sup>11</sup> McLean et al., "Syracuse Truce: Fourth Annual Assessment."

Nonetheless, Syracuse’s gangs continue to exist and keep wielding violent influence over the same areas and driving violent crime rates in the city. According to interviews with law enforcement officials, when top gang members were convicted, other lower-level members filled the vacuum, continuing the gang's existence. Furthermore, members of the CVIs stated that these prosecutions had loosened the gang’s authority structures and norms, which has given way to uncontrolled violence.

Syracuse Police Department (SPD) services and policies: The police department provides a vast array of services to the city and has twenty-six proactive programs. Among these, we can count the Perp Stat that focuses law enforcement efforts on the city’s chronic offenders; gun trafficking, and drug conspiracy investigations to tackle the illegal rents and weapons that fuel violence; and a complete set of localized problem-oriented policing actions that aim to provide solutions to communities in hot spots of crime, such as micro hot spot analysis, bike patrols, walking beats, and SWEEP. Moreover, all these initiatives are driven by highly technical data analysis from the Central New York Crime Analysis Center.

SNUG: Funded by the New York Department of Criminal Justice Services (NYDCJS) and launched in 2014. This program follows the cure violence model, which treats violent crime by detecting and interrupting potential conflicts, identifying and treating individuals at the highest risk, and mobilizing the community to change norms<sup>9</sup>.

Community Violence Interrupters (CVIs): These are not-for-profit organizations led by respected members of the communities where most violent crime is concentrated. They receive funds from diverse sources, among them philanthropies and the county and city governments. They leverage their credibility to approach at-risk individuals, victims, and their families to orient them towards less violent lifestyles and away from the gang and criminal activity. Each has developed a particular approach to interrupting violence, treating at-risk individuals, helping them access services, advocating for them in different instances, and equipping them with skills to abandon violence.

In interviews for this assessment, all CVIs’ representatives claimed their clients’ recidivism rates were below 20%. This would make them more effective than most violence prevention initiatives.

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<sup>9</sup> Cure Violence Global, “Information for Implementing Cure Violence.”

However, despite these success rates with their clients, violence levels were higher on average in the last decade. This indicates that there are gaps in this effort. This document will analyze them in detail in the fourth section.

The Gun Involved Violence Elimination (GIVE) Initiative: This is a state-wide effort led and funded by the NYDCJS and implemented locally by the Syracuse Police Department, the District Attorney's Office, the Onondaga Sherriff's Department, and the Onondaga Probation Department. They use the principles of problem-oriented policing (Scan, Analysis, Response, and Assessment) to diagnose gun violence problems and use a set of evidence-based policies previously selected by the State to solve them.

Currently, they are using hot spots policing and focused deterrence, which, in a few words, means concentrating law enforcement efforts in the places where crime is clustered and on those who commit a disproportionate number of crimes. They are also using other preventive policies, such as providing juvenile offenders with social services (Trinity program), making physical interventions to prevent crime (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)), and partnering with outreach organizations (SNUG).

These are evidence-based policies that have delivered positive results in other places. In Syracuse, gun homicides increased in the first year and a half of this program (July/14 to Dec/15). After that, these incidents constantly decreased from 2016 to 2019. However, in 2020-gun homicides grew by 108% and stayed at high levels the following year. In that sense, GIVE was initially successful, but the program stopped delivering the expected results after 2020. As this document will analyze, from that point onwards, the political, cultural, and legal environment changed, limiting the capabilities of law enforcement, particularly of SPD.

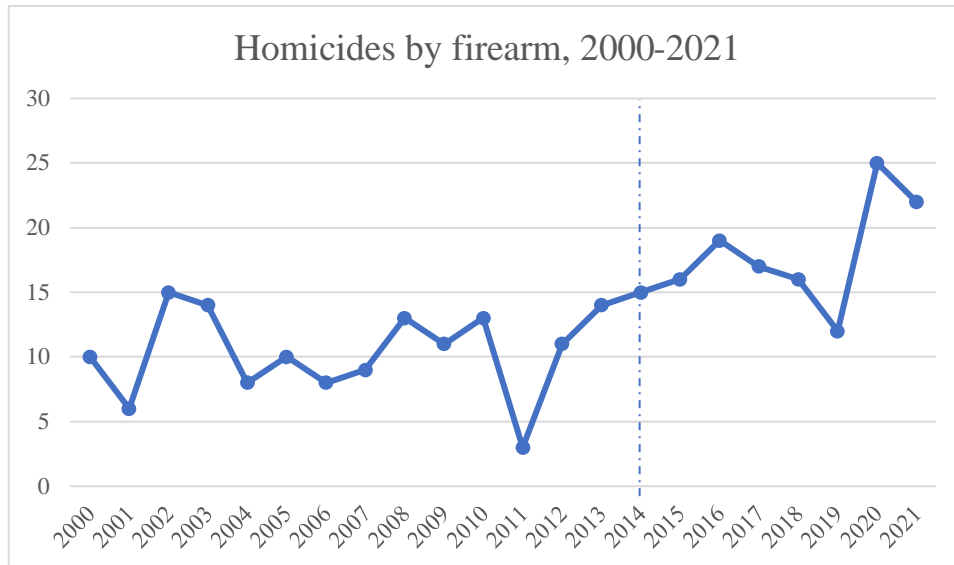


Figure 7. The annual number of homicides by firearm, 2000-2021. Source: CNYCAC

### 3. Consequences and costs

Violent crime produces mental and physical trauma, economic losses, diminished educational outcomes, and health consequences for the population. Furthermore, it negatively impacts the city’s public finances, property values, and economic growth. Therefore, high violent crime endangers the lives, health, and welfare of Syracusans and the city’s urban recovery prospects.

According to financial estimations<sup>10</sup>, one murder represents \$13,211,695.64 in tangible and intangible costs, and one aggravated assault \$155,706.36<sup>11</sup>. In that sense, Syracuse has lost four and a half billion dollars because of violent crime in the last ten years.

<sup>10</sup> McCollister, French, and Fang, “The Cost of Crime to Society: New Crime-Specific Estimates for Policy and Program Evaluation.”

<sup>11</sup> Estimations adjusted to inflation.

### **3.1 Consequences for victims and communities.**

Tangible costs: There are many consequences for victims of violent crime. First and foremost is the loss of life and the injuries suffered, robbing the city of the unrealized potential of gun victims and the unmeasurable effect on their families and greater community. Furthermore, other losses include medical expenses, cash losses, property theft or damage, and lost earnings. m, victims, their families, and the city at large suffer from productivity loss; the victim will stop producing, and those economic gains will never materialize. According to financial estimations of these<sup>12</sup>, each murder represents \$1,002,409 in tangible costs; an assault represents \$11,824.77.

Intangible costs include the enormous pain, suffering, and trauma suffered by victims and the risk of homicide (in the case of aggravated assault). Murder intangible costs are estimated to be \$11,474,101.81 per crime, and aggravated assault \$129,152.28 per crime<sup>13</sup>.

Trauma and mental health: violent crime in Syracuse severely damages the mental health of communities that endure it disproportionately. In a 2017 community survey conducted in Syracuse's neighborhoods where gun crime is clustered, over half of respondents indicated that they knew more than ten murder victims, and half showed signs of post-traumatic stress disorder<sup>14</sup>.

PTSD's symptoms include self-destructive behavior, trouble sleeping, irritability, angry outbursts or aggressive behavior, difficulty experiencing positive emotions or maintaining close relationships, and overwhelming guilt or shame<sup>15</sup>. These symptoms increase the risk of new violent acts in these communities, creating a never-ending cycle of violence and suffering. As professor Sandra D. Lane explains, Syracuse's communities that endure violent crime suffer from PTSD without the P because the violence never stops.

Educational outcomes: According to research, pupils from elementary schools in Syracuse areas with high levels of violence have 50% lower standardized test scores for ELA (English-Languages

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<sup>12</sup> McCollister, French, and Fang, "The Cost of Crime to Society: New Crime-Specific Estimates for Policy and Program Evaluation."

<sup>13</sup> McCollister, French, and Fang.

<sup>14</sup> Lane et al., "Neighborhood Trauma Due to Violence: A Multilevel Analysis."

<sup>15</sup> "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) - Symptoms and Causes."

Arts) and math than those from schools within zones with lower levels of violence.<sup>16</sup> This correlation is not a coincidence; a systematic review of 110 studies from 21 countries concluded that “all forms of violence in childhood have a significant impact on educational outcomes.”<sup>17</sup>

Economic consequences: Lastly, gun violence also impacts the local businesses' growth and home values of the communities that suffer it. According to a report that analyzed the economic impact of gun violence in different US cities<sup>18</sup>, gun homicide surges reduced the growth rate of new retail and service establishments by 4 percent. They also slowed home value appreciation by 3.9 percent. Gunshot surges slowed home value appreciation by 3.6 percent. Given that violent crime is clustered in areas with higher poverty levels<sup>19</sup>, this problem generates more significant socioeconomic disparities in the city.

### **3.2 City-wide consequences**

Property values and public finances: According to a report from the Center for American Progress<sup>20</sup>, a 10 percent reduction in homicides should lead to a 0.83 percent increase in housing values, and a 25 percent reduction in homicides should produce a 2.1 percent increase. In that sense, Syracuse's high levels of violent crime represent an enormous opportunity cost for the city

under the current housing market. If Syracuse could return to twenty homicides annually (the total number in 2019), the entire housing value could go up by \$49,850,095, representing a \$369,389 increase in extra tax revenues per year for the city government.

The criminal justice system and crime career: each crime demands a diverse set of actions from the criminal justice system that imply enormous costs for society. Criminal investigation, prosecution, trial, correction, and supervision processes demand heavy expenses in salaries,

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<sup>16</sup> Bergen-Cico et al., “Community Gun Violence as a Social Determinant of Elementary School Achievement.”

<sup>17</sup> Fry et al., “The Relationships between Violence in Childhood and Educational Outcomes: A Global Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.”

<sup>18</sup> Irvin-Erisckson et al., “A Neighborhood-Level Analysis of the Economic Impact of Gun Violence.”

<sup>19</sup> Larsen et al., “Spatio-Temporal Patterns of Gun Violence in Syracuse, New York 2009-2015.”

<sup>20</sup> Shapiro and Hassett, “The Economic Benefits of Reducing Violent Crime.”

logistics, facilities maintenance, and care, among others. According to estimations<sup>21</sup>, each murder represents \$533,272 in criminal justice system costs, and an aggravated assault signifies \$11,744.

On the other hand, human capital due to criminal activity generates a vast loss for society, given that those engaged in criminal activity that contribute to gross domestic product (GDP) or are not a part of the workforce when they are in prison.

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<sup>21</sup> McCollister, French, and Fang, “The Cost of Crime to Society: New Crime-Specific Estimates for Policy and Program Evaluation.”



## 4. Causes and risk factors

The violent crime problem in Syracuse can appear to be an intractable, incredibly complex issue. It involves many stakeholders and has multiple causes and risk factors. Therefore, tackling it requires deconstructing it into different approachable elements. Using the Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation approach<sup>22</sup>, this section will describe the causes and risk factors that enable the city's persistently high violent crime rates.

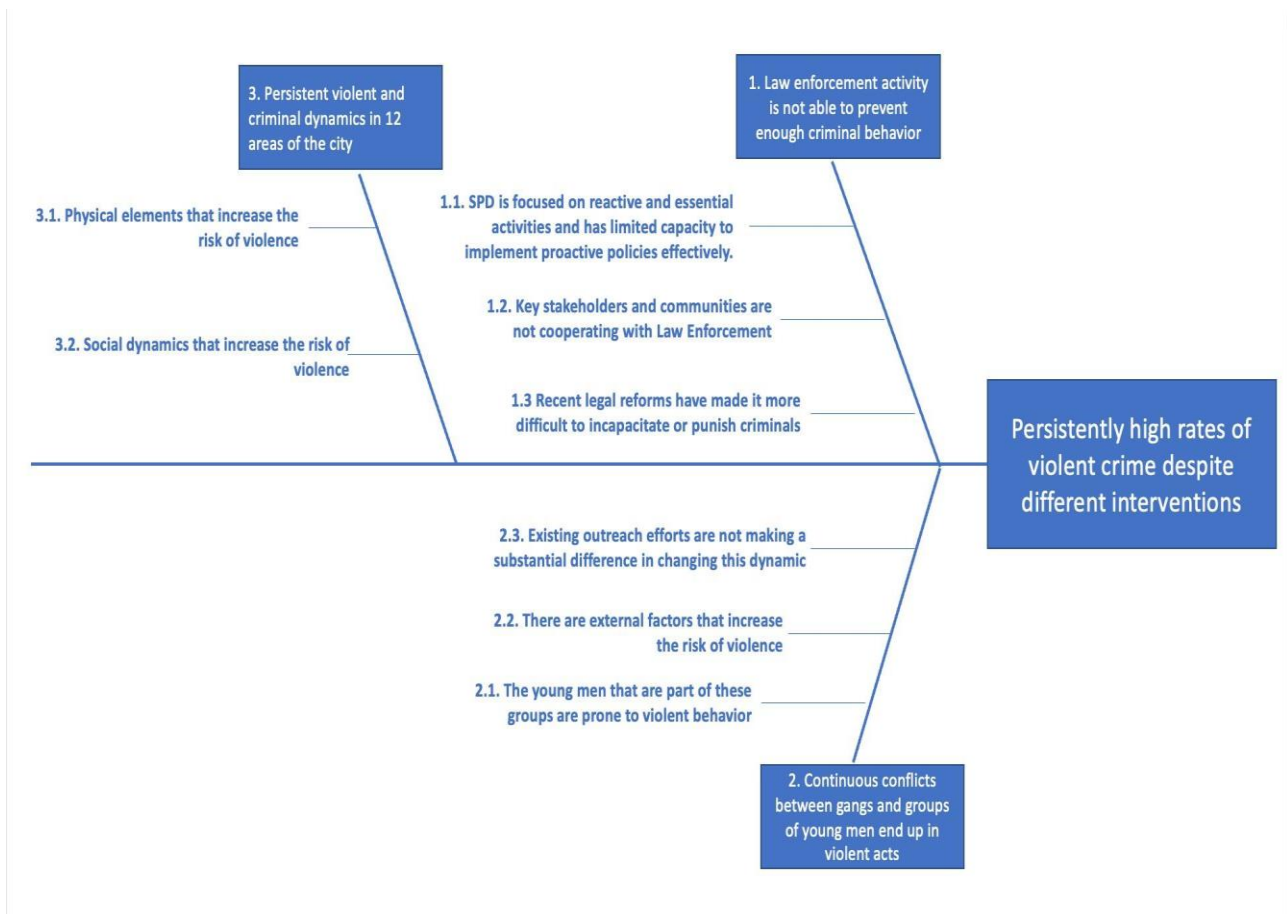
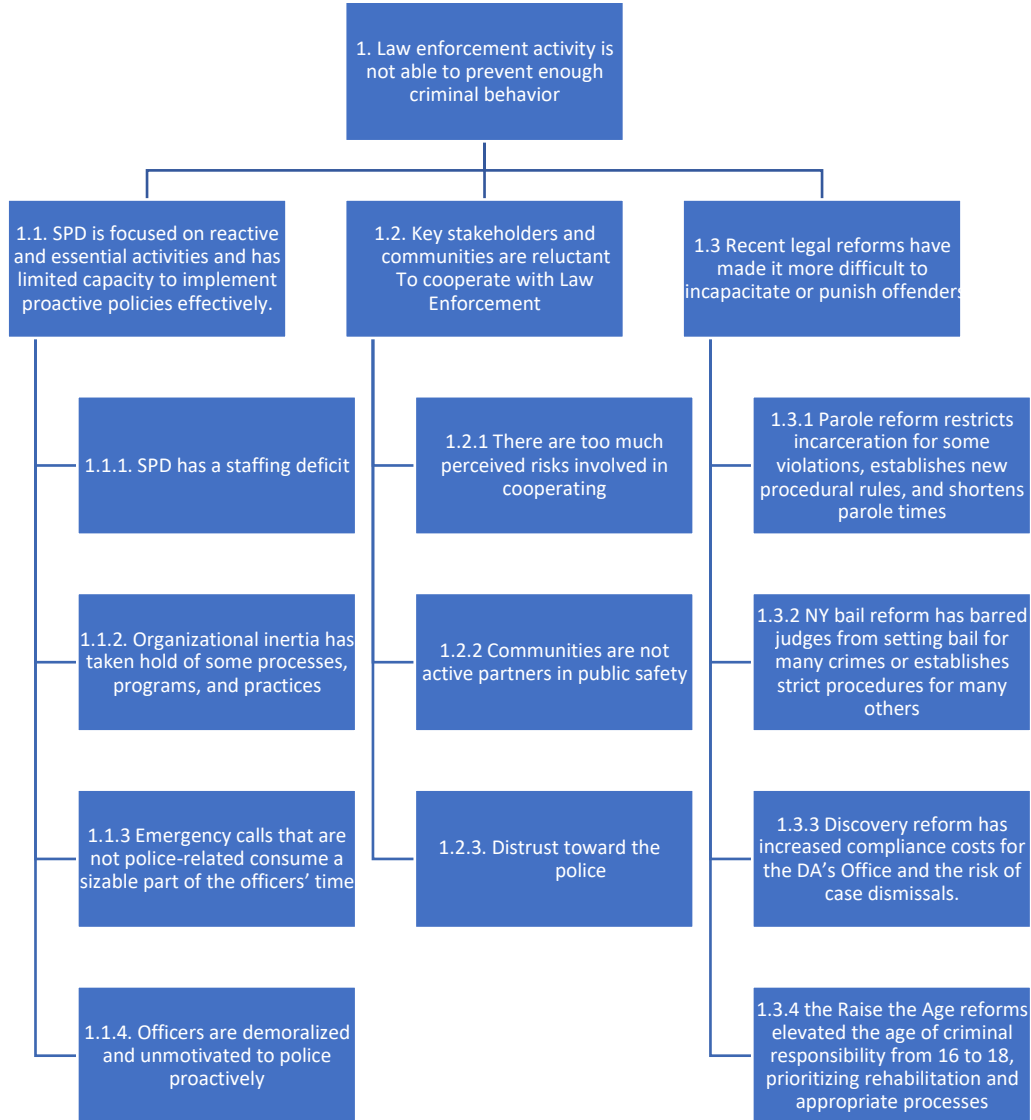


Figure 8. Problem's Fishbone Diagram Deconstruction.

<sup>22</sup> Samji et al., "PDIA Toolkit: A DIY Approach to Solving Complex Problems."

## 4.1 Cause 1: Law enforcement activity is not preventing enough criminal behavior



After a series of interviews with law enforcement officials, community members, and different non-profits, there is one broad conclusion: law enforcement services, as they are currently provided, are not preventing enough violent criminal behavior to maintain rates on acceptable levels or at least not as much as in previous years. Data backs this conclusion: homicides were higher on average in the last decade despite law enforcement’s vast array of data-driven programs, interventions, and policies.

From interviews, internal documents, and data, four factors were identified as the causes of this diminished deterrent effect: 1) 1.1. SPD is focused on reactive and essential activities and has limited capacity to implement proactive policies effectively; 2) key stakeholders and communities are not cooperating with Law Enforcement, and 3) recent legal reforms have made it more challenging to incapacitate or punish criminals.

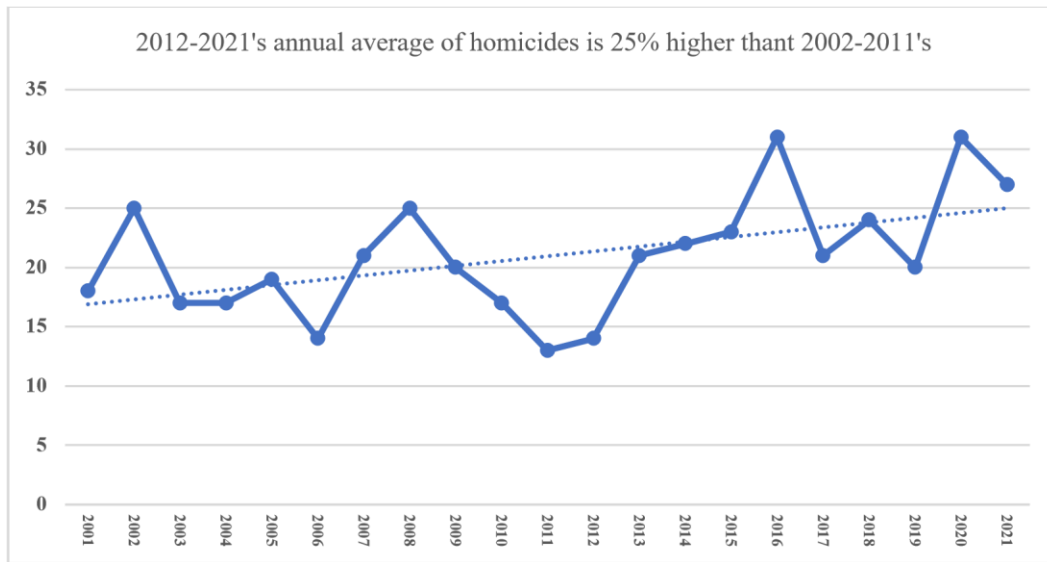


Figure 9. The annual number of homicides, 2001-2021. Source: SPD.

**Sub-cause 1.1: SPD is focused on reactive and essential activities and has limited capacity to implement proactive policies effectively.**

Documents, internal data, and interviews with officials and community members revealed that the SPD is struggling to keep up with its challenges. The agency is making a considerable effort to sustain its essential services, such as answering emergency calls, investigating crimes, or patrolling the streets. For instance, officers must constantly decide between starting a procedure, such as a speeding ticket, or answering an emergency call. Also, community leaders say SPD is not attending emergency calls as fast as needed. Additionally, several units have been disbanded, and their proactive plans are not delivering the expected results. For example, the Gun Violence Suppression

Detail, a task force in charge of getting illegal guns out of the streets, had to be disbanded because of a staffing deficit.

Despite mixed results, many of the proactive plans it has managed to sustain and launch remain unaltered after several implementation years. For example, they are required by the New York Department of Criminal Justice Services' guidelines to keep the GIVE initiative substantially unchanged, despite a considerable increase in violent crime in recent years. Lastly, many programs are implemented with too few resources to produce a significant impact. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design is an excellent example of a good policy that could produce better results with more resources.

**Four factors are causing this problem. The first is that SPD has a substantial staffing deficit.**

The agency went from having 487 officers in 2011 to 371 in 2021, which means 116 fewer officers in the city. More worryingly, this reduction happened while the population increased in the last two years. The number of police officers per ten thousand inhabitants went from 33.6 to 25.4, a 24.5% decrease. In that sense, the number of officers relative to Syracuse's population went down by almost a quarter.

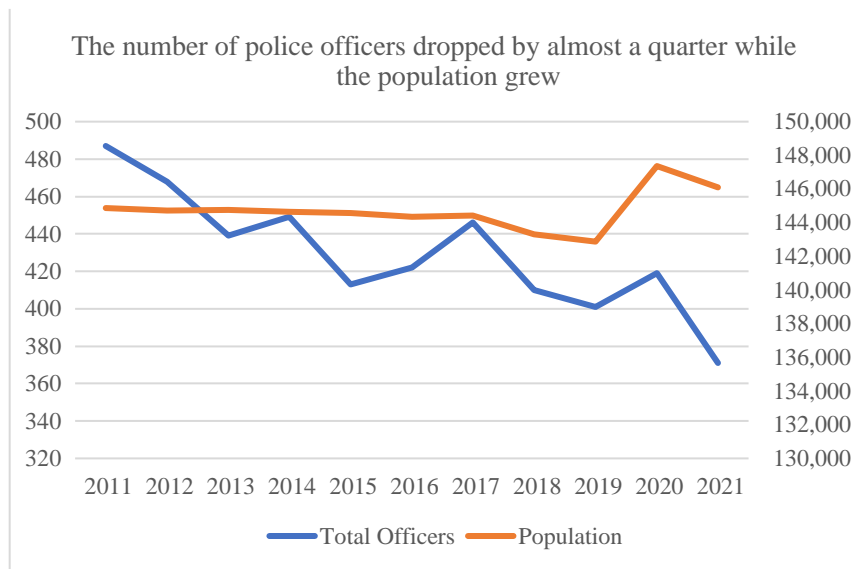


Figure 10. The total number of officers and Syracuse population from 2011 to 2021.

Such a substantial drop in police officers is generating a strain on SPD's resources and capabilities, resulting in more reactivity and less proactivity. The workload of 487 officers must be distributed among the 371 SPD currently has. Furthermore, since population and violent crime levels have increased, there is every reason to believe their workload has also increased. However, the number of productive hours a person can have on any given day is limited. Therefore, this work overload will result in tradeoffs prioritizing emergencies over proactive activities. If SPD's officers must answer more service calls, they will have less time for discretionary patrolling, building relationships with community members, or solving public safety-related problems.

This first factor is aggravated by **the second factor: emergency calls that are not police-related consume a sizable part of police officers' time.** Due to decreasing staffing numbers, SPD officers must spend more time on reactive work. But also, the time they spend on emergencies is disproportionately consumed by calls unrelated to police work or criminal activity, such as domestic verbal disputes. This situation removes critical and scarce resources from violent crime and orients them into incidents other government agencies could solve.

In 2022 alone, SPD officers have spent 680,057 minutes attending to calls related to domestic verbal disputes, motor vehicle collisions, civil disputes, and individuals suffering from mental health crises. Whereas they only spent 94,313 minutes responding to calls associated with gunshots. In that sense, SPD is spending seven times more person-hours on calls unrelated to crime than attending to the main factors that drive violence in Syracuse.

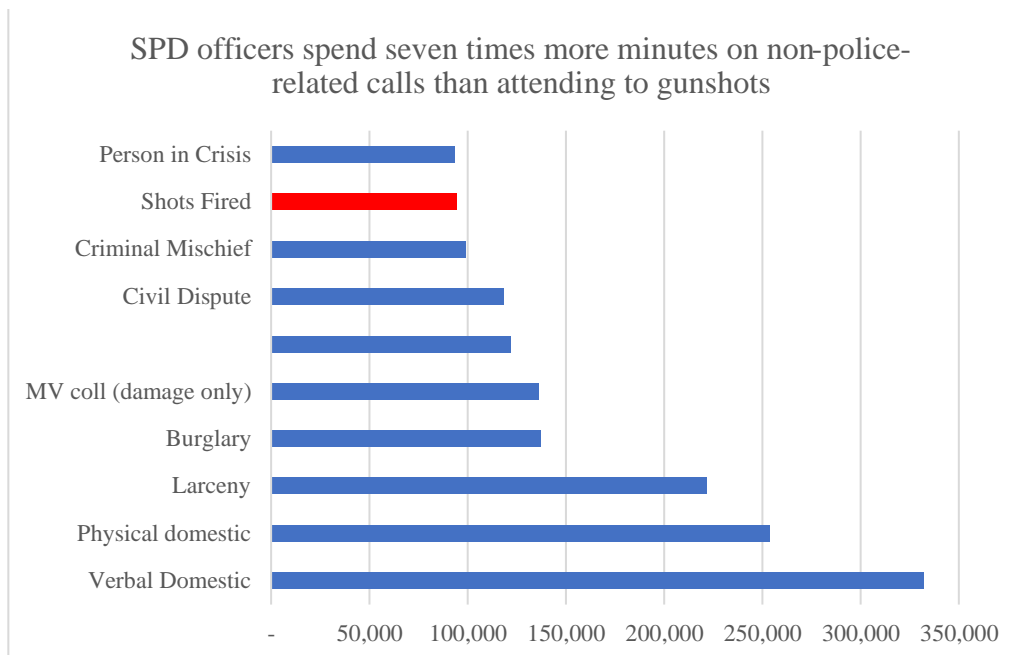


Figure 11. Total minutes spent by SPD officers on the top 10 call types that demand more time, from Jan 1<sup>st</sup> to Aug 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022

**The third factor is that organizational inertia has taken hold of many processes, programs, and practices.** As a well-developed organization, SPD has established a set of responses to violent crime. At specific points in time, these responses were quite successful. For example, the GIVE initiative reduced gun and gang homicides by almost half using evidence-based policies. However, this initial success gave way to rigidity, keeping these policies and processes unaltered, despite the evident growth in violent crime.

Again, the GIVE initiative is an excellent example of this: the last iteration of the program kept hot spots policing and focused deterrence as its primary focus<sup>23</sup>, without any significant change in those, despite a substantial increase in violent crime. Even though the NY Department of Criminal Justice Services restricts what SPD can do within this program, there’s no plan to develop and try new interventions to address these growing trends.

<sup>23</sup> Syracuse Police Department et al., “GIVE IX Question/Response Requirements.”

The rigidity by which SPD follows its programs and processes limits its potential to develop new and better responses; there's no room for problem-solving, experimentation, and learning.

**The fourth factor is that officers are demoralized and unmotivated to police proactively.**

George Floyd's killing was a watershed moment for police departments across the U.S. After this tragic event, anti-police-violence protests erupted nationwide. Although Syracuse didn't have the level of unrest that cities like Minneapolis had, there were several protests against police violence and some acts of vandalism against law enforcement infrastructure.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the reputation of the Police Force suffered as the public debate focused on complex subjects in policing, such as interactions with the public, the use of force, and racial discrimination.

These events generated legal reforms in New York and Syracuse that increased accountability, controls, and civilian oversight over the Police. The most important ones are the Right to Know legislation, which regulated police interactions with the public and established reporting guidelines for these; the repeal of section 50-a, which protected police officers' records of misconduct,

opening these up for public scrutiny; the New York State Professional Policing Act, which revised and updated the regulations of the police profession; the New York State Executive Law Section 70-b, which mandated the establishment of an Office of Special Investigations within the Office of the New York State Attorney General to investigate and prosecute criminal offenses committed by police officers; and The creation of the NYS Law Enforcement Misconduct Investigative Office, to prevent and remedy law enforcement misconduct.

According to law enforcement officials, the battered image of the police and the increased controls and legal challenges affected the morale of SPD officers. They perceive the post-Floyd political and legal landscape as hostile, with significant risks for those who police proactively. In that sense, many officers have adopted an overly cautious stance, avoiding any interaction that could produce friction. Others have left SPD entirely, straining the department's scarce human resources. Overall, they depict a situation where the police force is discouraged and afraid of doing their jobs.

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<sup>24</sup> Libonati and Lohmann, "How George Floyd Protests in Syracuse Went from Peaceful to Chaotic."

An uptick in resignations in recent years signals a growing dissatisfaction within SPD. During the previous two years, when these events happened, the number of officers that quit the force grew exponentially. As Figure 11 shows, officers' resignations in 2021 were ten times those of 2019 or 2020. This is more relevant, considering that no officers resigned between 2007 and 2018.

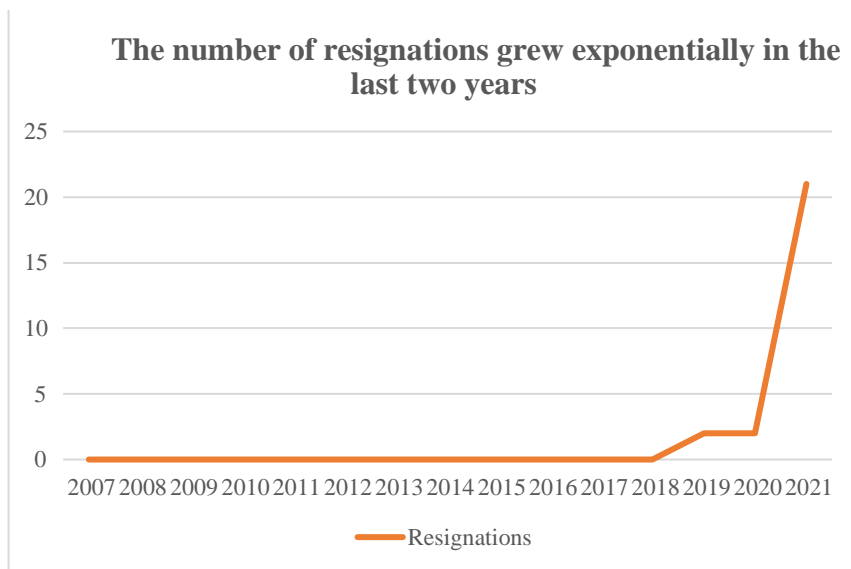


Figure 12. SPD Officers' retirements and resignations, 2007-2021.

**Sub-cause 1.2: Key stakeholders and communities are reluctant to cooperate with Law Enforcement**

This issue repeatedly appeared in interviews with law enforcement officials, CVIs officials, and community leaders. Witnesses are unwilling to testify, relatives of high-risk offenders hinder investigations, and procedures, such as arrests, are continually obstructed by bystanders. This makes violent crime challenges much harder than they should be cases go unsolved, critical information is never known, and patrolling neighborhoods becomes a complex and risky task.

As Sir Robert Peel, the founder of modern police, used to say: “the police is the community, and the community is the police.” Good law enforcement requires active cooperation and trust from citizens. Three factors are generating this problem.



**First, too many perceived risks are involved in cooperating with law enforcement.** According to interviews with community leaders, one of the key reasons why people refuse to cooperate is that they are afraid of the consequences. Even though officials assured in interviews that collaborators' lives are not in danger, many of these people live and work in hot spots of violent crime, where gangs have a strong influence. Moreover, their families and friends also live in these places. In that sense, it is not far-fetched to imagine that someone who is seen cooperating with authorities could be murdered, assaulted, or robbed.

The attack against the witness of Zach Holloway's murder in 2020 is a recent example<sup>25</sup> of what could happen to someone who dares to help law enforcement. It is difficult to make such a decision living in a place where shootings are everyday occurrences, and gang members are willing to kill someone for the most trivial reasons.

**The second factor is that communities are not active partners in public safety.** SPD and other law enforcement agencies do try to contact citizens constantly. For example, district commanders and supervisors attend monthly community meetings where they engage directly with citizens and get feedback from them<sup>26</sup>. SPD reaches out to communities to listen to their problems, takes action to address these, and then returns to receive feedback.

An excellent example of this was the TRUCE program. When the program was already in its implementation stage, law enforcement asked community leaders to validate this policy publicly and help them spread the message among their communities<sup>27</sup>. But these leaders didn't play an active role in designing this policy. They were presented with a finished product and asked to endorse something they didn't help to build.

As good as these interactions are, they still treat communities as mere information sources. Civilians are not active partners in Law Enforcement's planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. A review of documents, reports, and interviews shows no law enforcement programs

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<sup>25</sup> House, "Man Killed 19-Year-Old, Then Tried to Kill Witness in Syracuse, DA Says."

<sup>26</sup> Syracuse Police Department et al., "GIVE IX Question/Response Requirements."

<sup>27</sup> Worden and McLean, "Syracuse Truce, Year Two: An Assessment."

where the public engages in building solutions to public safety problems beyond providing information. Communities are not allies that could help them deliver better solutions. In that sense, people do not feel any ownership over what law enforcement does and, consequently, do not actively cooperate with them.

**The third factor is distrust towards the police.** As was already mentioned, after George Floyd’s killing, police departments faced increased criticism, calls for reform, and a contentious public debate. Moreover, massive and sometimes violent protests forced clashes between police forces and civilians across the nation, straining further the tensions around policing.

According to analysts and poll data, this complex political environment took a toll on the public’s trust in the institution, particularly among Black and Hispanic Americans.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, Black Americans have always had higher levels of distrust towards the police than other ethnic groups<sup>29</sup>.

Syracuse does not escape this tendency. A 2019 report<sup>30</sup> showed that SPD has much lower levels of legitimacy among Black Syracusans than Whites or Latinos. This poses a significant problem because violent crime is concentrated in areas with higher levels of African American population. Therefore, SPD is distrusted more by the communities that need the most help to tackle this issue.

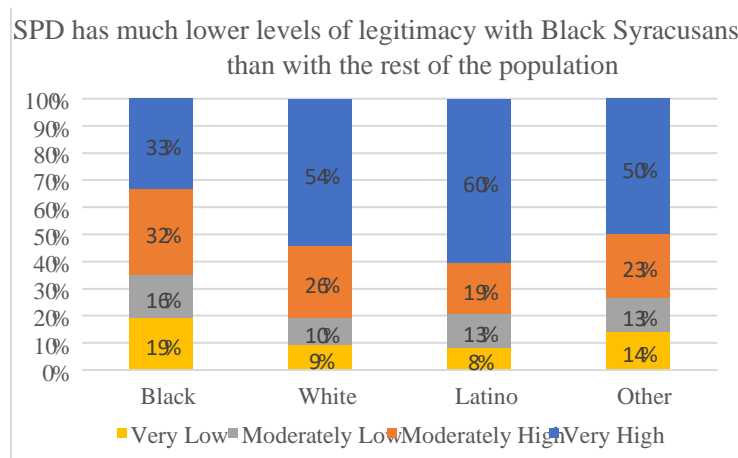


Figure 3 Police Legitimacy Index by Race

<sup>28</sup> Harrison, “Policing in the Post-Floyd Era.”

<sup>29</sup> Jeffrey, “In U.S., Black Confidence in Police Recovers From 2020 Low.”

<sup>30</sup> Worden, “Contacts with Syracuse Police: Citizens’ Assessments.” <sup>35</sup>

Worden.

**Sub-cause 1.3: Recent legal reforms have made it more challenging to incapacitate or punish criminal activity.**

According to law officials interviewed for this assessment, law enforcement tools were heavily restricted after recent criminal justice reforms in New York State. Today, they are less likely to arrest a person charged with committing a crime, which lowers the perceived risk of breaking the law and the general deterrent effect of the criminal justice system.

Their opinions go hand in hand with crime research: juveniles and criminals respond to incentives and sanctions.<sup>31 32</sup> Furthermore, the certainty of punishment has a more significant deterrent effect than its severity.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, if the probability of a sanction for a crime goes down because it is more difficult to administer, crime will go up. Moreover, if it is more difficult to restrict a repeated offender's freedom, that person will have more opportunities to commit a crime, and recidivism will increase, increasing crime rates.

These changes resulted from a broad movement for criminal justice reform after George Floyd's killing. The state of New York responded to that with substantial modifications to three institutions: parole, bail, and discovery. Additionally, the state raised the age of criminal penalty.

*The purpose of this assessment is not to produce any judgment on the merits of those reforms. Nonetheless, the following paragraphs describe how they effected the ability to arrest and prosecute someone charged with a crime or a violation.*

**First, parole reform restricts incarceration for some violations, establishes new procedural rules, and shortens parole times.**<sup>34</sup> The Less Is More Act determined limits on detention for parole violations. It barred imprisonment for some violations such as missing a curfew. For other

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<sup>31</sup> Corman and Mocan, "Carrots, Sticks and Broken Windows."

<sup>32</sup> Mocan and Rees, "Economic Conditions, Deterrence and Juvenile Crime: Evidence from Micro Data."

<sup>33</sup> Sampson, "Chapter 8: The Community."

<sup>34</sup> "What You Need to Know About the Less Is More Act."

violations, it only allowed incarceration after the third infringement. And finally, for absconding (intentionally avoiding supervision), the number of days of imprisonment was lowered. Also, according to law enforcement officials, paroles are not violated even for committing crimes while under supervision.

Furthermore, the reform established new processes and rules for the revocation of parole. It barred automatic incarceration, recognized the right to two hearings before cancellation, and the right to counsel at every stage of this process.

Lastly, this act provides a way to shorten parole times. Most parolees can reduce their number of days on parole by thirty days for every thirty straight days without violations. This disposition would allow shortening parole time by half. Also, there is a possibility to reduce parole times retroactively for up to two years.

**Second, bail reform has restricted the use of this mechanism.** Reforms aim to limit the usage of bail, encourage less restrictive means to ensure court appearance, and prevent low-income defendants from being imprisoned for purely financial reasons.

Under the 2019 reform, judges could not set bail for a comprehensive list of non-violent crimes and misdemeanors, such as burglary and several drug offenses. Defendants accused of these crimes were released to await trial, although some were monitored. For instances where bail could be set, judges had to consider a defendant's ability to pay, and the law encouraged using the least restrictive means to ensure the return to court.

In 2020, the law was reformed to allow judges to set bail for several other crimes and consider a defendant's criminal history for setting bail under certain conditions. In 2022 new changes were adopted to give judges more discretion in setting bail. It also included new considerations in this decision, such as the harm the defendant has caused or his history of gun possession. Lastly, it

expanded the list of crimes for which bail can be set and created strict rules for those accused of repeated offenses.<sup>35</sup>

**Third, discovery reform has increased compliance costs for the DA’s Office and the risk of case dismissals.** The discovery law regulates how prosecutors share evidence with the defense. Under a 2019 reform, prosecutors were given a tight time frame (20 to 35 days) to review, redact, and provide 21 kinds of probatory material to the defense. These included statements made by defendants or witnesses, designations for which witnesses would be called at trial, copies of search warrants, lists of publications and proficiency tests taken by experts for the past ten years, and all electronically created or stored information related to the case, among others. Failure to comply with these requirements and deadlines could result in the case's dismissal.<sup>36</sup>

The state legislature changed this law again in 2022; it kept this requirement and its deadlines but clarified expectations for prosecutors and gave judges more discretion to dismiss a case for lack of compliance.

**Fourth, the Raise the Age reforms elevated the age of criminal responsibility from 16 to 18, prioritizing rehabilitation and appropriate processes for these minors.** Before this reform, 16- and 17-year-olds arrested for criminal offenses were processed as adults. This meant that these minors were judged by an adult criminal court, held to the same standards as an adult, and imprisoned in adult facilities. At that time, New York was only one of two states that did this. In 2016, the last year before these reforms, 577 youths were sentenced to state prisons, and 2,399 were sentenced to local adult jails<sup>37</sup>.

After these reforms, felony cases against these youths start in the Youth Part of the Criminal Court, where they are processed under laws designed for this age group. Misdemeanors are processed by family courts, which cannot impose criminal liability and provides opportunities for adjustment.

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<sup>35</sup> Marcius, Closson, and Ashford, “New York’s Bail Laws Are Changing Again. Here’s How.” - The New York Times.”

<sup>36</sup> Halpern, “New York’s Discovery Reform Is Crushing Prosecutors.”

<sup>37</sup> The New York State Raise the Age Implementation Task Force, “New York State Raise The Age Implementation Task Force: Final Report.”

Furthermore, non-violent felonies are transferred to family courts unless the prosecutor files a motion alleging extraordinary circumstances. Youth charged with violent felonies can be transferred to Family Court if the charges do not include the accused displaying a deadly weapon during the crime, causing significant physical injury, or engaging in unlawful sexual conduct. Moreover, youth aged 16 and 17 can no longer be held in adult jails or prisons; they must be imprisoned in special facilities where they can receive appropriate rehabilitation services.

This reform has prioritized rehabilitation, adjustment, and specially designed processes for adolescent offenders. Punishment is the exception, not the general rule. In that sense, it has made it more difficult for law enforcement to penalize them for crimes. Moreover, according to press reports<sup>38</sup>, the state’s programs that were supposed to accompany the implementation of these reforms have arguably failed to provide critical services needed to rehabilitate youths and reinsert them into society. Therefore, according to law enforcement officials, these factors have limited their capacity to prevent minors from committing crimes.

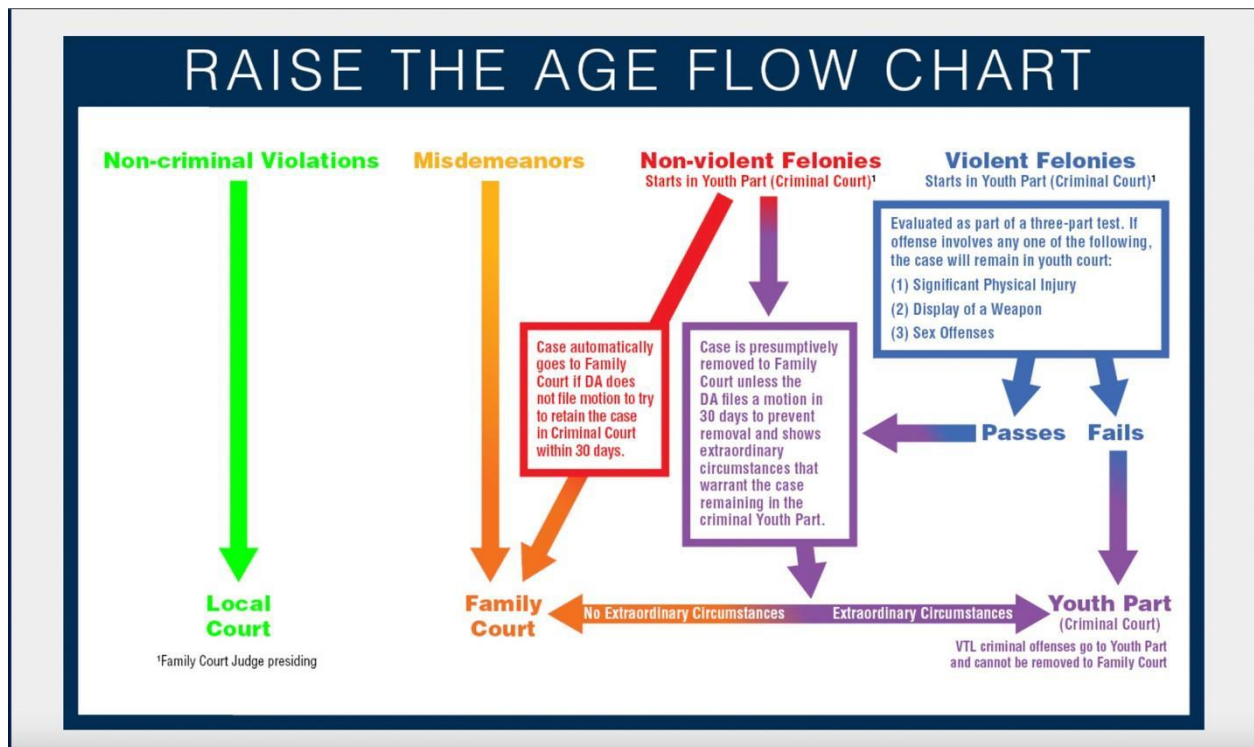


Figure 14. Raise the Age Flow Chart.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Lyons, “‘Raise the Age’ Falling Short on Transforming Troubled Youth.”

<sup>39</sup> New York State Assembly, “Raise the Age | New York State Assembly.”

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**4.2 Cause 2: Continuous conflicts between gangs and groups of young men end up in violent acts.**

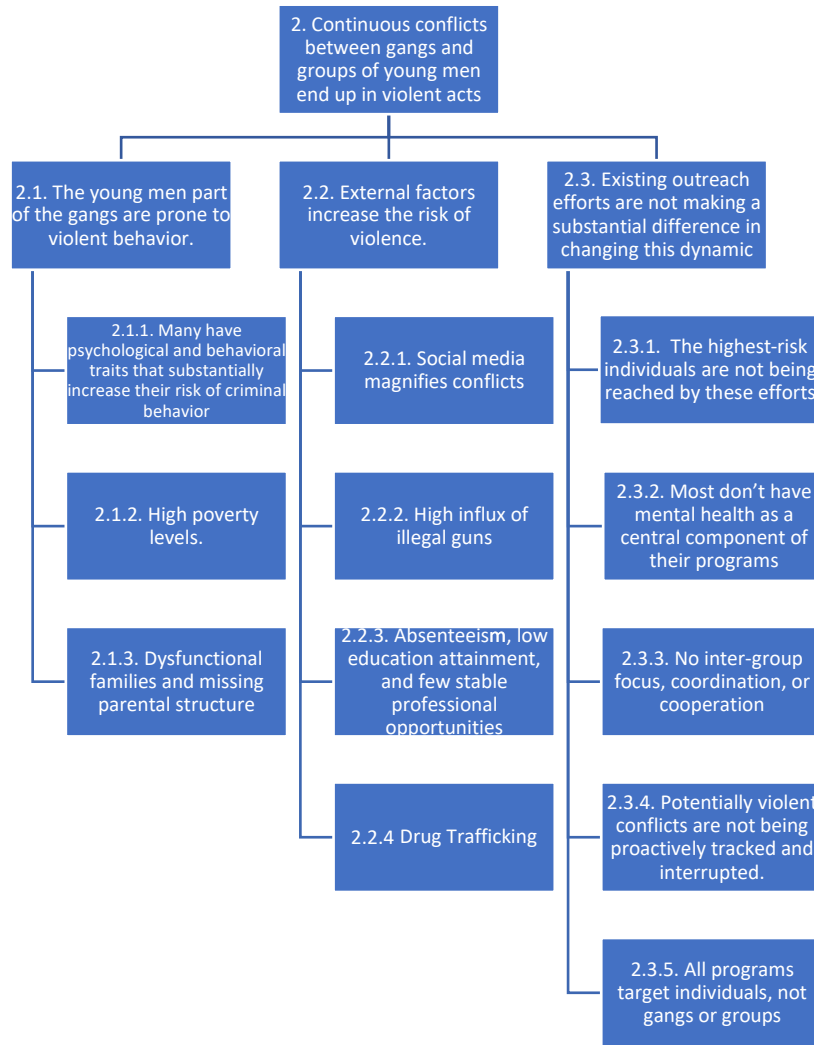


Figure 15. Deconstruction of Cause 2

According to all people interviewed for this assessment, this is the number one cause of Syracuse's persistently high violent crime rates. Stakeholder consensus is that the city's violence is driven by conflicts between gang members and groups of young men across the city. Data backs this view. As shown in figure 16, gang activity was the number one category of homicide in six of the last ten years. Moreover, data shows that the current spike in homicides is driven mainly by it.



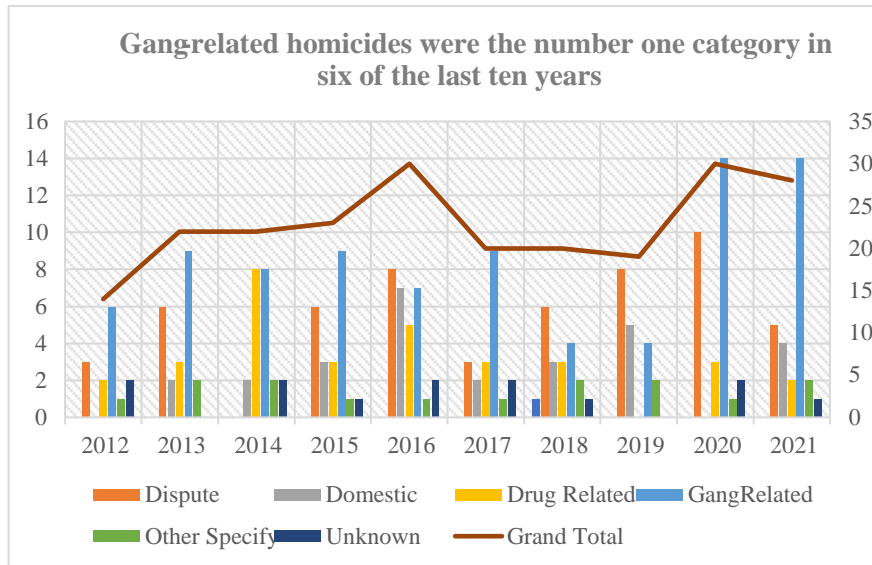


Figure 16. The number of homicides per motive, 2012-2021. Source: CNYCAC

Nonetheless, according to different stakeholders, Syracuse’s gang dynamic is characterized by one key factor: violence is mainly driven by personal conflicts and feuds. The primary reason is not to fight over money or territories to sell drugs, even though drug trafficking does add fuel to the fire. This is a toxic social dynamic where the most violent is the most admired. Therefore, gang members actively use violence to climb the social ladder, and every minor incident becomes an excuse to find validation.

For example, gang members kill or assault another person because he is going out with a girl from their neighborhood. They can also attack someone for having a “heated” discussion with one of his associates in a bar or simply for daring to visit their turf from a rival area. Sometimes, they go to other neighborhoods to shoot anyone from there to make a statement.

Data, reports, and interviews with key stakeholders identified three distinct factors as causes or aggravators of this persistent dynamic: 1) The young men of the gangs are prone to violent behavior.; 2) existing external elements increase the risk of violence; 3) Current outreach efforts are not making a substantial difference in changing this dynamic.

### **Sub-cause 2.1: The young men part of the gangs are prone to violent behavior.**

Violence is a central component of gang activity. According to a review of all gun crime incidents from 2019 to 2021 by the Central New York Crime Analysis Center<sup>40</sup>, gang<sup>41</sup> individuals compose 58% of those arrested for gun crimes. Also, 32% of gun crime victims were gang/group associated. Moreover, on average, 79% of homicides by gun and 61% of shootings with injury are related to these groups.

However, gang activity is not widespread among the population; gang members are only a tiny fraction of all young men in Syracuse. According to an estimation from the CNYCAC, there are thirteen hundred gang members in Syracuse, less than 7% of all males between 5 and 24 years. Therefore, gang activity only attracts and retains a small part of the young male population in Syracuse that is willing and prone to engage in these violent dynamics.

Three antisocial personality patterns strongly correlate with criminal behavior: risky pleasure seeking, weak self-control, and restless aggressiveness<sup>42</sup>. According to the interviews done for this assessment, many gang members show these patterns. For example, many homicides and assaults result from two rivals meeting by chance in a public venue and attacking each other immediately, a knee-jerk reaction without any previous thought process. The mere sight of a rival gang member or a small action from anyone triggers a violent and deathly response.

Also, they are adventurous pleasure seekers; they continually hustle for money, drugs, and sex without considering the consequences. A former gang member perfectly describes this state of mind in a couple of sentences: “The faster you make money, the faster you spend it. It’s like crack

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<sup>40</sup> Syracuse Police Department et al., “GIVE IX Question/Response Requirements.”

<sup>41</sup> A group is defined as associated individuals who engage in violent and criminal activity but whose grouping does not meet official gang criteria standards.

<sup>42</sup> Andrews and Bonta, “A General Personality and Social Psychology of Criminal Conduct: Summary and Conclusions.”

- quick money is a quick high, and then – crash, no money. You need more, and you need it quick.”<sup>43</sup>

These young men also show signs of the two forms of antisocial cognition that strongly correlate with criminal behavior: 1) Attitudes, values, beliefs, and rationalizations that support crime, and 2) cognitive-emotional states of anger, resentment, and defiance. Regarding the first one, the gang members rationalize their behavior in a way that validates their criminal acts. For example, they describe the area where they live as the ‘hood,’ not a neighborhood, a distinction that allows them to minimize the damage they do to their communities<sup>44</sup>. In their words: “So rather than feeling like you just stole your neighbors [sic] television, you would feel like you were just taking some resource of money from the hood...”<sup>45</sup>

They also continually experience feelings and thoughts of anger, resentment, and vengeance. Gang activity in Syracuse is a set of intractable disputes that resemble ethnic and religious conflicts. The gang members can trace their feuds to actions committed years and even decades before. Many have seen family members and close friends killed by other gangs. The trauma and hurt they have experienced make them harbor resentments that predispose them to violence. In one former gang member's words: “I would be ruminating on thoughts of disrespect, even small conflicts. I was harboring feelings and waiting for a look, a word or action to justify getting angry and fighting.”<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, gang members could also suffer from a form of behavioral addiction that would draw them towards criminal lifestyles: street addiction. In a 2013 study by Bergen-Cico et al.<sup>47</sup>, researchers interviewed several former members of Syracuse’s gangs. They found that these men consistently revealed a solid attraction for the adrenaline and intense stimulation of street life and

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<sup>43</sup> Bergen-Cico et al., “Street Addiction: A Proposed Theoretical Model for Understanding the Draw of Street Life and Gang Activity.”

<sup>44</sup> Bergen-Cico et al.

<sup>45</sup> Bergen-Cico et al.

<sup>46</sup> Bergen-Cico et al.

<sup>47</sup> Bergen-Cico et al.

criminal activity. Like gambling addicts, gang members constantly crave the rush they feel from engaging in this behavior and find it very difficult to disengage or stop thinking about this.

In one of the former gang members' words: "When I hear gunshots, I run – run toward the sound of where they're coming from. I want in. . . I want to see what's going on. . . I want in. It's like someone tripped a switch in my brain."<sup>48</sup>

Lastly, according to all accounts, gang members also abuse alcohol and drugs, a significant risk factor for violent behavior<sup>49</sup>. Alcohol and certain addictive substances (such as cocaine) affect cognitive functioning, reduce self-control, and increase the aggressiveness of an intoxicated person. Therefore, abusing these substances places gang members in a dangerous state where they are primed to react violently to the slightest of events or take active actions to produce violence (Gang-banging, for example). Considering their other behavioral and cognitive traits, substance abuse is like a gallon of gasoline thrown into a burning building.

**The second factor that explains gang members' propensity towards violence is their poverty levels.** These young men do not have their basic needs covered and have few family safety nets to fall on. This makes them easy targets to be recruited by gangs under a promise of easy money and all the benefits and prestige it brings.

Outreach workers and law enforcement officials agree that most gang members are impoverished young men. Many don't have enough money for food, clothing, or transportation. Moreover, many come from low-income families that cannot meet their basic needs, such as housing or nutrition. Moreover, they live in areas with high poverty and unemployment levels; and low economic activity, which means few or no opportunities to earn a living legitimately.

What does exist in their neighborhoods are gangs that can offer easy money and protection and social connection in exchange for selling drugs or committing crimes. This forces them to make a hard choice: suffer extreme poverty or engage in criminal activity. Even though most low-income

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<sup>48</sup> Bergen-Cico et al.

<sup>49</sup> Andrews and Bonta, "A General Personality and Social Psychology of Criminal Conduct: Summary and Conclusions."

young men and women take the second road, some do, and their poverty creates a big motivation for them to do so.

**The third factor is disjointed families and/or missing parental structures.** Many gang members live in households with no parental supervision or care. Therefore, they live in an environment where they are constantly abused or neglected, and there is no discipline or effort to teach them social norms or skills. In short, they don't receive the positive inputs that all human beings need to receive from guardians to live healthy lives in society. This, according to research, is a significant risk factor for possible criminal behavior.<sup>50</sup>

Again, on this point, there is consensus among law enforcement officials and outreach workers. According to them, there is a big break in these gang members' family structures and parental supervision. According to them, nobody has exercised the fundamental role of a guardian in these young men's lives. Moreover, many of them were abused or abandoned by their parents or family members. This creates a situation where kids and adolescents full of trauma, negative emotions, and no prosocial norms seek to find the base social constructs necessary to healthy growth in the streets of their neighborhoods.

### **Sub-cause 2.2: External factors that increase the risk of violence.**

Beyond the different conditions that make gang members prone to violence, they are also subject to other forces that nudge them further into this behavior. As Timothy 'Noble' Jennings Bey, a seasoned violence interrupter, says: "they live in an environment that pushes them into violence." Nevertheless, the forces that push them into criminal acts go beyond their physical settings.

**First, social media magnifies conflicts.** Gang members use these platforms to insult, challenge, and threaten their opponents. Researchers call this "internet-banging,"<sup>51</sup> a dynamic that can

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<sup>50</sup> Andrews and Bonta.

<sup>51</sup> Upton Patton, Eschmann, and Butler, "Internet Banging: New Trends in Social Media, Gang Violence, Masculinity and Hip Hop."

escalate conflicts exponentially, and several outreach workers in Syracuse have recognized it as a critical risk factor. This increases the likelihood of violent acts for several reasons.

First, rival group members can find and humiliate each other without any costs or risks; they just have to write a post or comment on one. Also, each interaction has an audience of thousands, making the humiliation greater and the peer pressure to respond stronger.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, social media enhances negative emotions and risk-taking behaviors.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, their engagement maximizing algorithms amplify their insults and fights by making them appear in the timelines of those more likely to respond to this content.<sup>54</sup> Lastly, these exchanges are relived constantly, through screenshots or reposts, stretching the humiliation over time.

In a typical example, gang members post a picture with guns, taunting and insulting their rivals. Their opponents respond by insulting them and challenging their manhood. Dozens enter the argument, posting more insults and liking the sharper comments. This makes the post more popular, and the algorithms respond by making it appear in different timelines of users who are more likely to respond to such content. More people enter the argument; they are hundreds now. Both parties feel embarrassment and anger. They are pressured by peers that are watching this. Finally, these young men with a propensity toward violence cannot take the shame anymore and decide to take the matter into their hands. They get armed to the teeth and go to settle the dispute by their preferred method: violence, producing more victims and crimes.

**The second external risk factor is a high influx of illegal guns.** Law enforcement officials manifested that the amount of illicit firearms in the city has increased in the last two years. Even after disbanding the Proactive Policing Unit, the number of weapons confiscated by SPD has grown substantially in recent years. This indicates a fast-growing illicit market in Syracuse.

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<sup>52</sup> Elsaesser, “How Social Media Turns Online Arguments Between Teens Into Real-World Violence.”

<sup>53</sup> Mailman School of Public Health, “Just How Harmful Is Social Media? Our Experts Weigh-In. | Columbia Public Health.”

<sup>54</sup> Barrett, Hendrix, and Sims, “How Tech Platforms Fuel U.S. Political Polarization and What Government Can Do about It.”

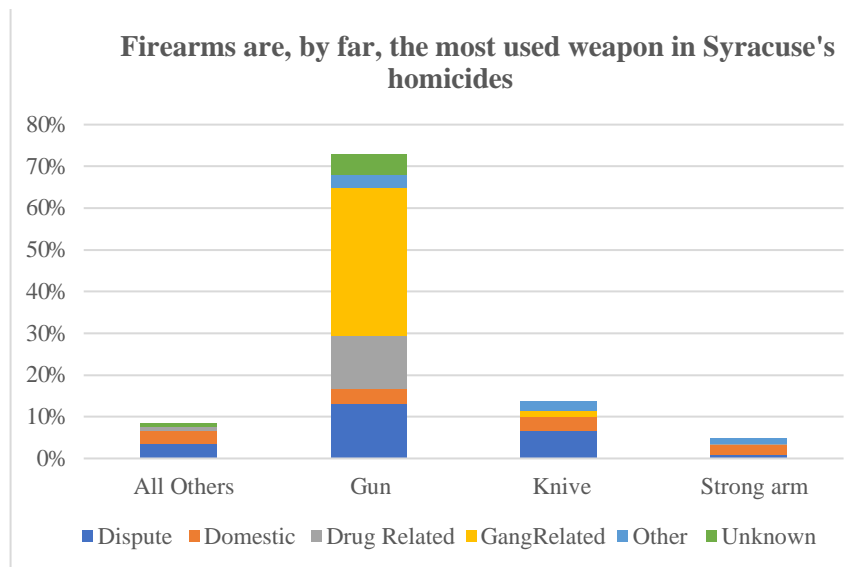


Figure 17. Homicides by weapon and category, 2012-2021. Source: CNYCAC.

As was already explained, almost all of the gang-related homicides of the last decade were committed with firearms. These are the preferred instruments of these groups to exercise violence. However, it is implausible that a gang member will buy a gun legally because of New York’s strict gun laws. This forces these groups to purchase their firearms in the illicit market. Therefore, gang members will have more opportunities to acquire weapons and commit new violent acts if more illegal guns enter Syracuse.

**The third external risk factor is absenteeism, low education attainment, and few stable professional opportunities.** Schools and workplaces are settings where people are rewarded for prosocial behavior, enhance social bonds, and find a sense of fulfillment. In that sense, having a stable job, staying in school, and achieving educational goals generates a positive feedback loop where a person gets rewarded for beneficial actions that help society (through greater productivity and human capital) while being kept away from antisocial behavior. Furthermore, maintaining jobs and attaining educational goals will improve the economic outlook of the person, taking away the

need for money as a motivation for criminality. Therefore, low performance and satisfaction in school and work are predictors of possible criminal behavior<sup>55</sup>.

Unfortunately, gang members live in areas with low educational outcomes and high poverty. In the case of education, pupils from elementary schools in areas with high levels of violence have 50% lower standardized test scores for ELA (English-Languages-Arts) and math than those from schools within zones with lower levels of violence<sup>56</sup>. Furthermore, according to interviews, many gang members are outside the school system. In the case of jobs, gang members live in areas with the highest levels of concentrated poverty, where opportunities are scarce.

In that sense, gang members are not in the settings that could control anti-social behavior and reward them for positive behavior, inhibiting the capacity of Syracuse's society to prevent violence. On the contrary, they are in situations where violence is rewarded, and they are discouraged and diverted from positive behavior.

**The fourth external risk factor is Drug Trafficking.** According to law enforcement officials, former gang members, and outreach workers interviewed for this assessment, drugs are a pervasive factor in gang life. Gang members consume it constantly and traffic with it. This last element increases the risk of violence for three reasons: 1) it provides an economic incentive for using force, 2) it enhances the attractiveness of gang life, and 3) it gives them the resources to buy guns and cover their groups' expenses.

Drug trafficking is a very profitable business. It generates high incomes for those willing to take the risk, and these high rents are a strong motivator to keep and open new markets and protect assets. Since drug traffickers cannot use the legal system to mediate disputes, they use violence to protect their profits: 14% of Syracuse's homicides in the last decade were related to drugs. When gangs enter this business, they insert themselves into this violent dynamic that will push them into using violence to earn more and more money.

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<sup>55</sup> Andrews and Bonta, "A General Personality and Social Psychology of Criminal Conduct: Summary and Conclusions."

<sup>56</sup> Bergen-Cico et al., "Community Gun Violence as a Social Determinant of Elementary School Achievement."



Furthermore, the drug business provides them with resources to buy cars, alcohol, and other luxuries, enhancing the attractiveness of gang life, which will help them recruit more people. This money is also a great motivator to not abandon the gang lifestyle for a regular-paying job. Lastly, drug money will allow them to buy weapons and cover their needs, sustaining the capability of gangs to produce damage constantly.

**Sub-cause 2.3: Existing outreach efforts are not making a substantial difference in changing this dynamic**

One of Syracuse's most valuable assets is its network of Community Violence Interrupters. Their approach was described on a general level in the second section of this document. However, it is essential to mention that they make an enormous effort to tackle violent crime in Syracuse using different outreach approaches. Furthermore, most focus on at-risk youth, the same population that fills the gangs' ranks.

Some, such as the Good Life Foundation, use art, hip hop culture, entrepreneurship, advocacy, and coaching to take youth away from crime. Others, such as the Street Life Addiction Institute, make specially designed interventions to address trauma and street life addiction in at-risk youth. Lastly, some, such as SNUG or The Salvation Army, use case management and mentorship to control possible criminal behavior and refer at-risk youth to different social and legal services. OGS Against Violence and SNUG also engage in violence interruption.

Their efforts are laudable, full of conviction, and diverse. Furthermore, according to them, their clients' recidivism rates are below 20%.

Nevertheless, the annual average number of homicides grew in the last decade. Furthermore, gang activity continues to be the number one cause of homicides in Syracuse, especially in the previous two years. In other words, despite their efforts, violence has increased in the city. This means that CVI's work is not making a substantial difference in changing the gang-driven violent dynamics in Syracuse.

Five critical gaps in this effort are the causes behind these organizations' failure to effectively influence violent crime in Syracuse.

**2.3.1. These efforts are not reaching the highest-risk individuals.** It is a fact that a tiny fraction of the population is responsible for most of the crime in every city<sup>57</sup>. Therefore, crime prevention efforts that focus their work on these top offenders are the most effective because they help to prevent the most crime-prolific individuals from committing new crimes.<sup>58</sup> In Syracuse’s case, the outreach network is not doing this.

The CNY Crime Analysis Center already lists Syracuse’s most prolific violent criminals; they call this list CORE. They detect the city's top adult and juvenile offenders using data on the number of arrests for gun and violent crimes, the number of shootings, and gun and drug intelligence. According to responses from several outreach organizations (some didn’t share this information), only 10% of the CORE members are currently being intervened by them.

In other words, CVIs are not targeting those who cause most of the crime in Syracuse. This explains, in part, why they are not making a substantial difference in violent crime rates.

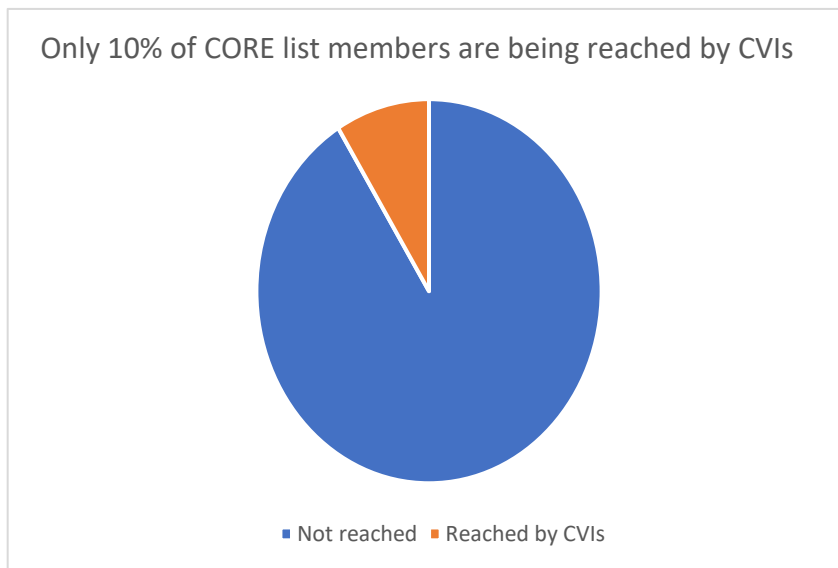


Figure 18. The number of CORE list members. Source: CNYCAC and interviews.

<sup>57</sup> Abt, *Bleeding Out*.

<sup>58</sup> Braga, Weisburd, and Turchan, “Focused Deterrence Strategies Effects on Crime: A Systematic Review.”

### **2.3.2. Most don't have mental health as a central component of their programs.**

As was shown in sub-cause 2.1., many gang members have psychological and behavioral traits that increase their risk of violent behavior, such as antisocial personality patterns or alcohol abuse. These individuals will continue to act violently if these factors are not proactively addressed. That is why policies that use proven mental health therapies, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, are highly effective in reducing violent crime<sup>59</sup>.

However, most outreach organizations, except for the Street Addiction Institute, do not have mental health as a central component of their programs.

In the case of the Salvation Army, they refer their clients to mental health services, but taking therapy is optional, and less than half receive the service. SNUG has an in-house therapist, but receiving the service is optional, and most of their clients are not receiving this service. Good Life Foundation does not have this option in their program, but they do refer clients to these services. Furthermore, OGS Against Violence only deals with conflict interruption.

This gap in the city's outreach efforts is severely limiting its effectiveness. Not only are CVIs leaving one big reason behind gang violence unaddressed, but they are also unintentionally hindering their other interventions.

For example, a CVI could help a gang member learn entrepreneurship and establish a legitimate business. However, if that person is aggressive and has weak self-control, he could put his business at risk if he doesn't know how to handle a heated discussion with an unsatisfied client. Moreover, suppose he is addicted to street life or alcohol. In that case, he will find it very difficult to resist the temptation to return to his gang, where his former colleagues could easily indulge him.

**2.3.3. No inter-group focus, coordination, or cooperation.** Most outreach officials said that the lack of coordination among Community Violence Interrupters is the main challenge in addressing violent crime in the city. Their overall perception is that all organizations are trying to address this

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<sup>59</sup> Lipsey, Landenberger, and Wilson, "Effects of Cognitive-Behavioral Programs for Criminal Offenders."

issue alone. They are only focused on their individual approach, and there is little incentive for them to work together due to the constant competition for scarce funding sources. Therefore, they interact as competitors in a tough market, not allies trying to solve a problem jointly. According to one of them: “everybody wants to be the hero and have all the money.”

From interviews, observation of meetings, and official documents, it is clear they have no shared goals, plans, indicators, or information. Each CVI works independently, trying to help its clients with their resources and capabilities. Therefore, they end up with small programs that help some individuals but do not have the reach in numbers that the city requires. Moreover, they all want to help to address violent crime, but they haven’t defined a joint plan to do this, which results in fragmented efforts and redundancies. The fact that they are not getting to the city’s top offenders shows they lack a shared focus.

Since they don’t share information or indicators, clients go from one organization to the other, receiving services without someone tracking their progress through the entire network. For example, at-risk kids have received the same service twice from two organizations without showing much improvement. Moreover, instead of assisting clients with their various resources in a holistic manner, they go to fix a particular issue without addressing others. For example, they help a gang member set up a barber shop without attending to the mental health issues that endanger his success as a business owner.

This problem is not only related to these organizations’ practices; it is also a consequence of the little funding available for violence prevention in Syracuse. Besides the GIVE initiative and what the Street Addiction Institute receives from the city government, there is no source of funding to prevent gang or gun violence in Syracuse. Therefore, no violence prevention program sets city-wide goals, plans, and indicators to organize the CVI’s work in a coordinated fashion.

#### **2.3.4. Potentially violent conflicts are not being proactively tracked and interrupted.**

The Cure Violence model is one of the most significant innovations in crime prevention in recent decades. Using the WHO’s approach to reverse the spread of infectious diseases, this model employs trained, culturally appropriate workers to stop violence with three essential activities: 1)

detect and interrupt potentially violent conflicts, 2) identify and interact with individuals at the highest risk, and 3) mobilize the community to change norms.<sup>60</sup>

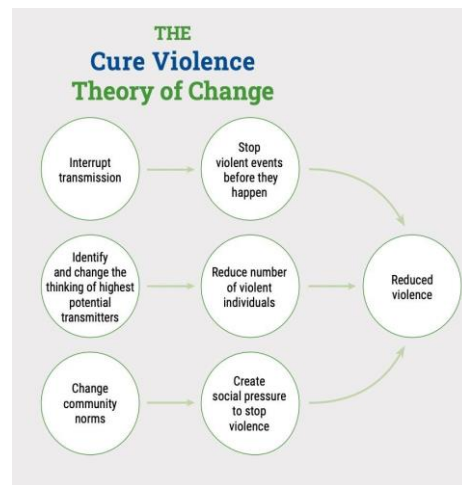


Figure 19. The Cure Violence Model. Source: cvg.org

The state of New York funds SNUG to implement the Cure Violence model in the city. Traditionally, the program tried to follow the model’s essential three components. However, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic true fidelity to the model was suspended. Observations of outreach coordination meetings and interviews corroborate this. Recently the program has reestablished pre pandemic services. SNUG officials see this change as a way to proactively stop conflicts from happening. In their view, intervention with these individuals prevents future acts of violence they could commit in the future.

They are right on a certain level; engaging with high-risk individuals does prevent violence. That is why this is the second component of the model. However, in a critical situation where violence is increasing at an alarming pace, there is a need for proactive *and* reactive measures.

To continue the public health parallel, when covid was at its peak, authorities took action to prevent it from causing damage in the future by developing a vaccine. But they also implemented measures to slow its rate of transmission immediately by imposing facemask mandates, among other

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<sup>60</sup> Cure Violence Global, “The Evidence of Effectiveness.”

policies. Prevention without reaction would have been incomplete, and avoiding one activity creates a gap for the disease to continue spreading.

Syracuse *is* in a critical situation: homicides grew by 58% in 2020 and have stayed at those high levels. As Figure 12 shows, gang-related homicides were the main drivers of this hike in violence. As explained in previous sections, inter-gang violence is caused by feuds and personal conflicts between gangs and group members. This situation requires, among other things, proactive tracking and interruption of those gang conflicts driving the city’s crime rates. Therefore, Syracuse must assist SNUG to implement all three components of Cure Violence, particularly detecting and interrupting potentially violent conflicts.

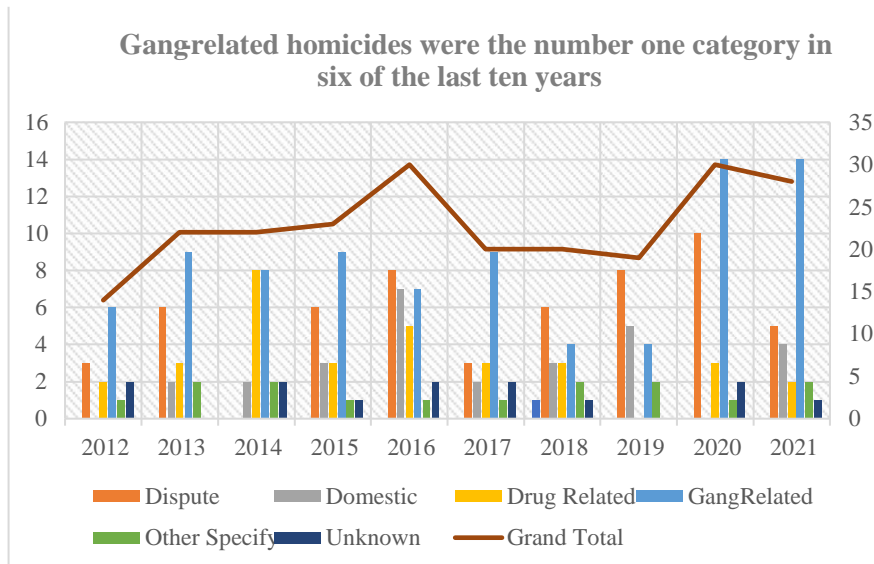


Figure 20. The number of homicides per motive, 2012-2021. Source: CNYCAC

**2.3.5. All programs target individuals, not gangs or groups.**

This is the last gap identified in Syracuse’s outreach efforts. Community Violence Interrupters focus their work on their clients, not on the groups they are part of. In that sense, they provide valuable services that help that person, but they don’t address the gangs’ social pull over him. Consequently, his group’s social dynamics could push him to relapse into violent behavior. It is as if an alcoholic was allowed to meet his drinking friends at his favorite bar after each day of treatment.

All the outreach organizations follow a similar general process: 1) they identify or get referred high-risk individuals; 2) assess that person and match him with different services; 3) provide services to improve his condition, and then try to equip him with practical skills and resources; 4) lastly, they conclude the service and end their connection with the client, while others continue to supervise his progress permanently.

The problem with this general process is that it doesn't consider the social appeal of the gang lifestyle, one of its central components. Many are attracted to gangs because they want to belong to a group, a strong impulse in humans. The gangs' social pull is even more solid for these young men if we consider that many of them lack strong family supports and are outside their schools and churches. In that sense, the gang fills their social deficits, becoming a vital source of self-fulfillment.

Furthermore, once these young men are part of a gang, they will receive their primary social cues from their colleagues and act as they do. As the social scientist Robert Cialdini explains, humans determine what is correct by finding out what others think is correct<sup>61</sup>. If the gang members act rashly and violently, their fellow members will follow them.

In that sense, gangs have a powerful influence over their members: they fill their need to belong, deliver self-fulfillment, and provide them with social cues to determine what is appropriate behavior. Given this, it is challenging to change the behavior of an high risk-individual if his gang continues to exercise such power over him. Moreover, even in a successful case where a person disengages from gang life, the group will continue to exist, and others will quickly fill his position, keeping violent dynamics unchanged.

This individual-focused approach partly explains why, after so many years of outreach work, these groups continue to exist with different people: the individuals are engaged, re-socialized, incapacitated, or murdered, but the gangs remain over time. Given this, it is essential to point out that the most effective focused deterrence strategies are the ones that target criminally active

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<sup>61</sup> Cialdini, "Chapter 4. Social Proof: Truths Are Us."

groups or gangs.<sup>62</sup> In that sense, outreach efforts should follow suit and consider the need to target groups as they treat individuals.

### 4.3 Cause 3: Persistent violent and criminal dynamics in 12 areas of the city

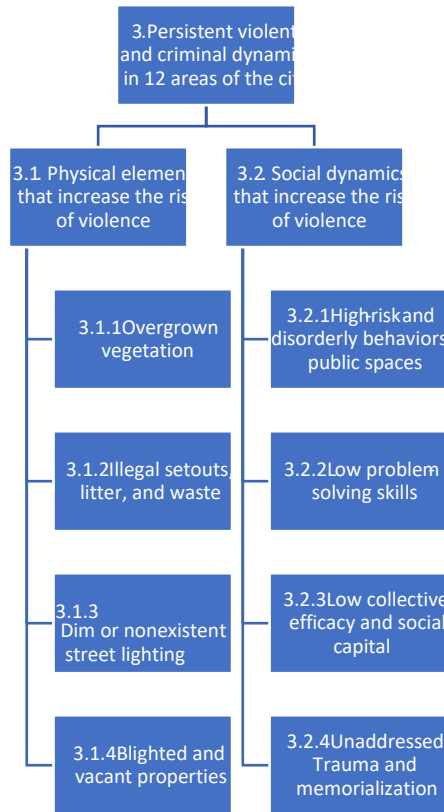


Figure 21. Cause 3 Deconstruction.

Last decade’s homicides were clustered around eleven specific spots on the city's north, west, and southwest sides and one additional eastern area close to Westmoreland Park. Furthermore, according to law enforcement and city officials, this geographical concentration has been stable. These are the areas where violence has happened historically, except for the northern hot spot, which became violent in the last decade, according to city officials.

<sup>62</sup> Braga, Weisburd, and Turchan, “Focused Deterrence Strategies Effects on Crime: A Systematic Review.”



This concentration also holds for shootings. A 2017 research paper<sup>63</sup> identified gun violence clusters in these same areas; as Figure 23 shows, the geographical location of these overlaps with the homicide clusters.

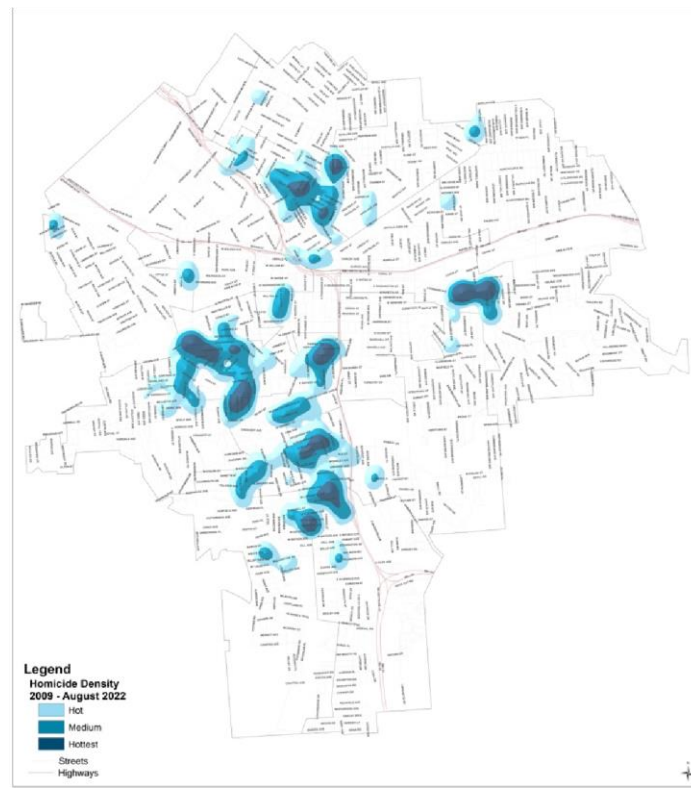


Figure 22. City of Syracuse Homicide Density, 2009 – August 2022. Source: Central New York Crime Analysis Center.

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<sup>63</sup> Larsen et al., “Spatio-Temporal Patterns of Gun Violence in Syracuse, New York 2009-2015.”

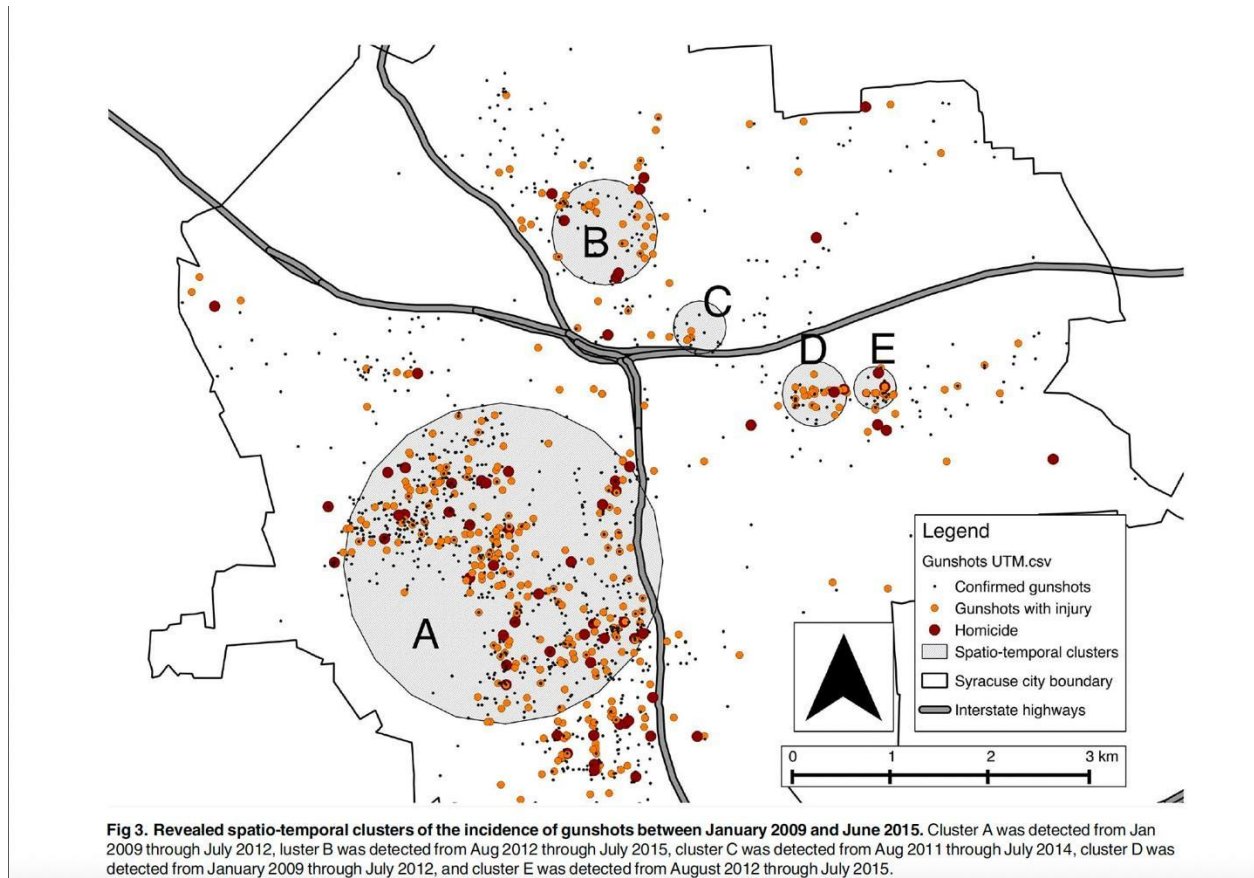


Figure 23. Spatio-temporal clusters of gun violence. Source: Larsen et al.<sup>64</sup>.

This stable geographic concentration suggests that there are certain conditions within these areas that create a favorable environment for violent crime to happen. One is gang presence; clusters of violence coincide with these groups' zones of influence. Also, these places have socioeconomic features that favor the gangs' emergence, such as absenteeism, low educational levels, concentrated poverty, and segregation, among others. This document has already analyzed the gang factor.

However, as was explained in section 2, gang-related homicides only account for 34% of last decade's homicides. Violent crime is also driven by other factors, which are influenced by the particular social dynamics and physical features of these places.

<sup>64</sup> Larsen et al.

The social dynamics and physical environment of places influence crime and violence in three fundamental ways: First, they can increase opportunities to commit a crime<sup>65</sup>. For example, vacant and unkept houses are ideally suited for selling drugs and hiding illegal guns; a bar without metal detectors and private security is the perfect place to sneak a weapon and kill a rival gang member.

Second, an environment of generalized disorder (where laws and norms are visibly broken) nudges people into breaking other norms or even committing crimes.<sup>66</sup> If people observe that others are breaking the rules, they will replicate that behavior or let other concerns, apart from rule-abiding, guide them. For example, if a person observes that his neighbors are illegally disposing of large items on his street, he will be likelier to do the same when he needs to throw away a piece of old furniture.

Third, empowered communities prevent crime activity by exerting social control or pushing authorities into action. Therefore, the safest neighborhoods are those that have strong social bonds, high levels of social capital, and communities that are willing and capable of acting together for the common good.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, vibrant public spaces that encourage social interactions and connections among residents facilitate positive social interaction.<sup>68</sup>

Data, field observations, and interviews with community leaders and officials revealed several factors that produce these effects in the violence clusters. This document will present them in two groups of conditions that increase the risk of violence: physical elements and social dynamics.

### **Sub-cause 3.1: Physical elements that increase the risk of violence**

Four different features or issues were identified in Syracuse’s violent crime clusters. These are 1) overgrown vegetation, 2) illegal setouts, 3) dim street lighting, and 4) Blighted properties. These

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<sup>65</sup> Felson and Clarke, “Opportunity Makes the Thief: Practical Theory for Crime Prevention.”

<sup>66</sup> Keizer, Lindenberg, and Steg, “The Spreading of Disorder.”

<sup>67</sup> Sampson, “Chapter 8: The Community.”

<sup>68</sup> Aiyer et al., “From Broken Windows to Busy Streets: A Community Empowerment Perspective.”

elements can provide opportunities to commit crimes, signal a generalized state of divestment, or hinder communities’ social control over the area.

	<i>Opportunities for crime</i>	<i>Generalized Disorder</i>	<i>Hinders Social Control</i>
<i>Overgrown vegetation</i>	✘	✘	✘
<i>Illegal setouts</i>		✘	✘
<i>Dim street lighting</i>	✘		✘
<i>Blighted properties</i>	✘	✘	✘

Table 1. Effects of physical features.

3.1.1 Overgrown vegetation: This element was observed in several violent crime clusters, mostly inside vacant properties and deteriorated houses. Moreover, three hundred reports of overgrown grass in those areas were received through the SYRCityline app last year.

Primarily, this element obstructs the view of neighbors and police officers, making the site more difficult to protect and providing cover to commit an offense. Moreover, when the vegetation violates city regulations, it also signals a state of disorder that nudges people into rule-breaking behavior. Also, this feature provides the perfect hiding space for weapons, illegal substances, and potential offenders. Picture 1 illustrates an example of overgrown vegetation that could easily facilitate criminal behavior.



*Picture 1. Example of overgrown vegetation in a violent crime cluster.*

3.1.2. Illegal setouts, litter, and waste: Littering and improper disposal of waste were observed in most clusters of violent crime in the city. Furthermore, more than nine thousand reports of illegal setouts and litter from those areas went through the SYRCityline app. It is, by far, the number one complaint from neighbors in those spots; this issue represents 73% of all their reports.

Even though an illegal setout doesn't necessarily increase opportunities to commit a crime, accumulated waste and litter create a state of disorder that nudges people into behavior driven by perceived or actual divestment. Disposing waste incorrectly is a behavior that breaks formal city rules and social norms. Therefore, a littered street is one in which rules are not followed or enforced, and people will conclude that it is safe to break other rules. If a person sees a piece of old furniture on the curb, he will think it is ok to litter around it.

Moreover, a street full of waste is a hostile environment that discourages people from engaging in positive interactions that enhance social bonds and control.



*Picture 2. An example of illegal setouts and litter in a cluster of violent crime.*

3.1.3. Dim or inexistent street lighting: Even though this is not a generalized feature of all violence clusters, it was observed in some of them, particularly on the city's north side. Furthermore, 138 reports of weak or damaged streetlights in those areas came through the SYRCityline app in the last year.

Dim or inexistent streetlights provide more opportunities to commit crimes. Like overgrown vegetation, this feature makes supervision of streets difficult. It also provides cover for criminal activity. Lastly, people avoid dark streets or alleys; therefore, these places discourage interactions and social connections among residents, weakening social controls over these areas. Vibrant areas are safer, but they require good street lighting.

Research has demonstrated the relationship between street lighting and crime. For example, one study concluded that street lighting is significantly associated with decreased odds of adolescent homicide.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, a meta-analysis of thirteen studies determined that improved street lighting significantly reduces crime.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Culyba et al., “Modifiable Neighborhood Features Associated With Adolescent Homicide.”

<sup>70</sup> Welsh and Farrington, “Effects of Improved Street Lighting on Crime.”

3.1.4. Blighted and vacant properties: This feature is quite present in all the city’s violent crime clusters. This issue was mentioned repeatedly by community leaders in interviews. Besides, field observation revealed a substantial number of these properties. Additionally, in the last year, 256 home and building maintenance complaints were received through the SYRCityline app. Moreover, a 2017 study concluded that Syracuse’s census blocks with more vacant houses had higher levels of gun violence.<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, different studies have identified an association between blighted and vacant properties and crime. One study concluded that maintained vacant lots are significantly associated with decreased odds of adolescent homicide.<sup>72</sup> An evaluation of a program to restore vacant land indicated that it was associated with significant reductions in crime and perceptions of crime.<sup>73</sup>

Three reasons explain this association between vacant or deteriorated properties and violent crime: they increase opportunities to commit crimes, provide easy targets for visible rule-breaking, and hinder community social control.

First, these properties are a perfect hiding place for guns, drugs, or other illegal items. They are also unsupervised spaces where a potential offender can easily commit a crime or find an escape route. Second, given that these places are abandoned, they are easy targets for vandalism and crime.

Lastly, these are intimidating places that neighbors usually avoid. Consequently, blighted properties discourage social interactions around their areas, damaging communities’ social capital and hindering social control over criminal activity. In short, neighbors retreat from blighted zones, giving way to crime and vandalism.

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<sup>71</sup> Larsen et al., “Spatio-Temporal Patterns of Gun Violence in Syracuse, New York 2009-2015.”

<sup>72</sup> Culyba et al., “Modifiable Neighborhood Features Associated With Adolescent Homicide.”

<sup>73</sup> Branas et al., “Citywide Cluster Randomized Trial to Restore Blighted Vacant Land and Its Effects on Violence, Crime, and Fear.”



*Picture 3. Example of blighted properties in clusters of violent crime.*

### **Sub-cause 3.2: Social dynamics that increase the risk of violence**

Four of these social dynamics were identified in Syracuse’s violent crime clusters. These are 1) High-risk and disorderly behaviors in public spaces, 2) low problem-solving skills, 3) low collective efficacy and social capital, and 4) Unaddressed Trauma and memorialization. These elements can also provide opportunities to commit crimes, signal a generalized state of disorder, or hinder a communities’ social control over the area.



	<i>Opportunities for crime</i>	<i>Generalized Disorder</i>	<i>Hinders Social Control</i>
<i>Disorderly behaviors in public spaces</i>	✘	✘	✘
<i>Low problem-solving skills</i>	✘		
<i>Low collective efficacy and social capital</i>	✘		✘
<i>Unaddressed Trauma and memorialization</i>	✘		✘

3.2.1. Risky and disorderly behaviors in public spaces: These constitute a vast array of actions and dynamics, from blasting music at very high levels to public intoxication. Furthermore, all the physical features analyzed previously constitute disorderly behaviors in themselves. For example, an owner must disregard his care and maintenance duties for a house to become blighted. These behaviors were observed in all clusters of violence, although they vary in each area. Moreover, interviews revealed that community leaders were concerned about these issues, and city officials were aware of how these affected the resident’s quality of life.

These behaviors are not violent, but many are illegal, violate social norms, and create favorable conditions for violent crime. First, disorderly activity creates opportunities for violent crime. For example, public intoxication is a situation where a gunfight can break quickly, given that many intoxicated individuals are in an unsupervised area and armed rivals can approach them easily, as happened in Clinton Square’s latest shooting.<sup>74</sup> In another example, gangs cannot use a well-maintained and locked empty house to store guns or drugs, whereas a blighted property is perfect for them.

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<sup>74</sup> Carlson, “See the Moment a Shooter Opened Fire in a Crowded Clinton Square and What Syracuse Is Doing about It.”

These disorderly behaviors contribute to violence because they are salient examples of generalized rule-breaking. Therefore, as was explained before, if people observe that others are breaking the rules, they will replicate that behavior or let other concerns, apart from rule-abiding, guide them.<sup>75</sup> For example, someone is more likely to commit a crime or disrupt social norms in a place full of litter, blight, and graffiti. As one community member put it, many of these clusters are “areas of lawlessness,” where many feel empowered to break the law brazenly.

Lastly, as we already explained, communities avoid areas where disorderly or high-risk behaviors happen. Drinking in public, music blasted at high levels, streets full of litter, or open-air drug dealing, among others, create intimidating environments that scare communities away. Therefore, when communities retreat from those streets, their social capital is damaged, and their ability to exert social control over those areas decreases, ultimately leaving open spaces for criminal activity.

3.2.2. low problem-solving skills: Behind gang activity, personal disputes are the leading cause of homicides in Syracuse. This factor was responsible for 24% of last decade’s homicides and was the leading cause in 2016, 2018, and 2019. A significant part of the violence in the city happens because of poorly managed conflicts among residents.

One painful example is Chennal Price-Green’s murder. According to law enforcement, this tragic incident resulted from an argument over social distancing that got out of hand.<sup>76</sup> Minor disagreements that could be solved with dialogue result in tragic consequences and shattered lives.

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<sup>75</sup> Keizer, Lindenberg, and Steg, “The Spreading of Disorder.”

<sup>76</sup> Stevenson, “Second Trial over Syracuse Woman Killed in Pandemic Social Distancing Dispute Begins.”

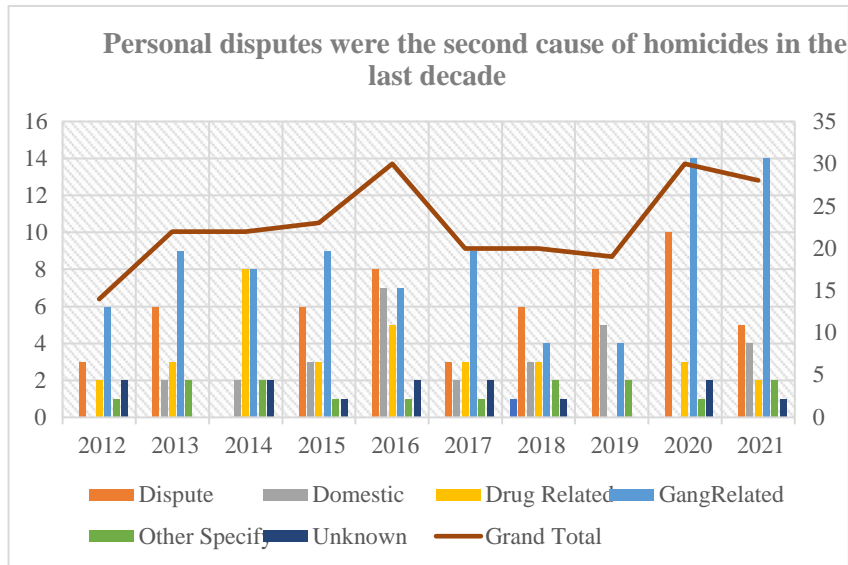


Figure 24. The number of homicides per motive, 2012-2021. Source: CNYCAC

### 3.2.3. low collective efficacy and social capital:

Unfortunately, communities in these clusters of violence struggle to take control over the violent behavior that occurs in their neighborhoods. Fear of the consequences of proactive steps and disheartened after decades of violence, neighbors strive to find the solutions to improve safety.

Community leaders described a situation where their neighbors are stressed, afraid, and actively avoid these issues; people don't collaborate to improve safety because they believe nobody else does. Field observations also evidenced many areas within these clusters where street life is almost inexistent; desolate streets and public spaces with no social interaction or commercial activity, only abandoned properties, vacant lots, and disorder.

Given that community life is so disrupted in these areas, potential offenders have plenty of opportunities to act. In short, neighbors have retreated from many of their streets while crime and violence have taken hold of them.

3.2.3. Unaddressed Trauma and memorialization: These twelve clusters of violent crime represent only a small part of the city's territory. Nonetheless, it is there where almost all of the violence of

the last decades has taken place. Therefore, the people that live in these areas have endured unimaginable trauma. In a 2017 study<sup>77</sup>, researchers conducted a community survey in some of these zones and found that over half of the participants knew more than ten victims, and half showed signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

These levels of trauma represent an enormous risk of future violence. For example, PTSD's symptoms include self-destructive behavior, irritability, angry outbursts, aggressive behavior, difficulty experiencing positive emotions or maintaining close relationships, and overwhelming guilt or shame.<sup>78</sup> Each of those symptoms can push a person into violent behavior. Therefore, if the mental wounds of all this trauma are not healed, these communities will continue in a never-ending cycle of violent crime.

Unfortunately, this trauma goes unaddressed. In a 2018 study<sup>79</sup>, Rubinstein et al. describe the lack of support and recognition for this communities' grief process from the city at large. According to accounts in that study, community members feel that their losses are treated as unimportant. Moreover, their grief expressions are not recognized as such and, consequently, are not supported appropriately by public servants.

Additionally, city officials and outreach workers described how these communities actively avoid mental health services. But also, they mentioned that, in any case, it would be challenging for them to access those services because of a deficit in affordable trained professionals in the county.

Therefore, this unaddressed trauma continues to damage the collective mental health of these communities, increasing the risk of future violent behavior.

Furthermore, the risks of violence are aggravated by the memorialization process that these communities use to cope with their trauma. In the same study by Rubinstein et al.<sup>80</sup>, researchers describe how victims of gun violence are widely commemorated and become subjects of admiration, inspiring others to follow their path. In that sense, impoverished youth from these

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<sup>77</sup> Lane et al., "Neighborhood Trauma Due to Violence: A Multilevel Analysis."

<sup>78</sup> "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) - Symptoms and Causes."

<sup>79</sup> Rubinstein et al., "Blood in the Rust Belt."

<sup>80</sup> Rubinstein et al.

areas, with little else in life, observe the vast demonstrations of affection for the victim. Neighborhood memorials typically include alcohol, balloons and stuffed animals which are overtaken by the elements and worn. A mechanism for memorializing lost love ones with symbols of life should be implemented.

## Conclusion

When Judge Thomas J. Miller, a seasoned judge with more than ten years of experience, was about to sentence Angel Rosario, one of Draquan McDonald’s murderers (whose story was told in the introduction), he asked Angel: “To what end? What purpose? Why is there all this devastation? Why are you going to prison? Why are these other people going to prison for such lengthy periods of time? For what?”<sup>81</sup>

These are fundamental questions that this document hopes to answer. It defined the problem and its consequences. Also, it identified thirty-one different root causes that cover legal, organizational, social, economic, cultural, and urbanistic issues.

Syracuse’s violent crime is an incredibly complex problem with numerous causes, many of which involve complex issues. Tackling it requires efforts by all the stakeholders involved: law enforcement, society, families, schools, communities, non-profits, media, and the public sector at large, among others.

Nonetheless, this document is the first step toward possible solutions. It aspires to shed light on this intractable problem; by identifying its root causes, it provides actionable entry points that the city at large can tackle. Not one reason is responsible for this senseless violence. A successful effort requires addressing several of them. The next step is for Syracusans to face all the elements that fuel violent crime and build collective solutions that are appropriate for the city’s context, capabilities, and problems. The work has just begun.

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<sup>81</sup> Dowty, “‘Absolutely Unbelievable’ Violence Leads Syracuse Judge to Compare City to Wild West.”

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## **6. List of abbreviations**

CNYCAC: Central New York Crime Analysis Center.

CPTED: Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design.

CVI: Community Violence Interrupter.

DOJ: United States Department of Justice.

GIVE: Gun Involved Violence Elimination.

NYDCJS: New York Department of Criminal Justice Services.

POP: Problem-Oriented Policing.

RICO: Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act.