

Pandemic, Social Unrest, and Crime in U.S. Cities

Mid-Year 2022 Update

RICHARD ROSENFELD

Curators' Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Criminology
and Criminal Justice, University of Missouri - St. Louis

BOBBY BOXERMAN

Graduate Research Assistant, University of Missouri-St. Louis

ERNESTO LOPEZ

Research Specialist, Council on Criminal Justice

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Richard Rosenfeld is the Curators' Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Missouri - St. Louis. His research focuses on crime trends and crime control policy. Professor Rosenfeld is a Fellow and former President of the American Society of Criminology.

Bobby Boxerman is a doctoral student at the University of Missouri – St. Louis.

Ernesto Lopez Jr. is the Council's Research Specialist and a doctoral student at the University of Missouri – St. Louis.

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Summary

- + This study updates and supplements previous reports by the Council on Criminal Justice (CCJ) on recent U.S. crime trends with additional crime data through June of 2022. It examines monthly crime rates for 10 violent, property, and drug offenses in 29 American cities. Not all cities reported data for each offense, and the data used to measure the crime trends are subject to revision by local jurisdictions.
- + Over the past two years, homicides and gun assaults trended upward while most property crimes receded. In the first half of 2022, crime patterns partially reversed: in particular, homicides and gun assaults declined while property crimes rose.
- + The number of homicides declined by 2% in the first half of 2022 compared to the first half of 2021 (a decrease of 54 homicides). While this reduction is heartening, the homicide rate is still 39% higher than it was during the first half of 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- + The number of gun assaults dropped by 6% in the first half of 2022, but this trend is based on data from just 12 cities and should be viewed with caution.
- + Aggravated assaults (+4%) and robberies (+19%) increased in the first half of 2022 compared to the first half of 2021.
- + Domestic violence incidents decreased by 5% between the first half of 2021 and the first half of 2022. This result is based on just 12 cities studied and should be viewed with caution.
- + Residential burglaries (+6%), nonresidential burglaries (+8%), larcenies (+20%), and motor vehicle thefts (+15%) all increased in the first half of 2022 compared to the first six months of 2021.
- + Drug offenses dropped by 7% in the first half of 2022 over the first half of 2021.
- + The authors conclude that high rates of violent crime and recent increases in property crime require immediate action from law enforcement and policymakers, including expansion of crime-prevention strategies of proven effectiveness and the enactment of needed policing reforms. Both initiatives are necessary to achieve durable reductions in violence and other crime in our cities.

Introduction

This report updates CCJ's previous studies of crime changes during the coronavirus pandemic, extending the analyses with data through June of 2022. The results signal a partial reversal of the crime patterns found in the earlier work. The current study finds a drop in homicide and gun assaults and a rise in robbery and property crime. That said, the authors' conclusions have not changed: long lasting reductions in violence and crime will require cities to adopt evidence-based crime-control strategies and long-needed reforms to policing.

The 29 cities included in this study (see Appendix for full list) range from Norfolk, VA, the smallest, with 245,000 residents, to New York, the largest, with more than 8.4 million residents. The mean population of the cities for which crime data were available is approximately 1.1 million, while the median population is roughly 652,000.

This report assesses monthly changes between January of 2018 and June of 2022 for the following 10 crimes: homicide, aggravated assault, gun assault, domestic violence, robbery, residential burglary, nonresidential burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, and drug offenses. As in the previous reports, this analysis focuses special attention on the trend in homicides. It also examines the substantial increase in robbery and property crimes that took place during the first half of 2022.

The crime data were obtained from online portals of city police departments that provided monthly incident-level data for the period between January 2018 and June 2022.¹ Offense counts were converted to monthly crime rates per 100,000 city residents for analysis of trends. Offense classifications varied somewhat across the cities, and not all cities reported data for each crime. The number of cities reporting crime ranged from a high of 26 for robbery and motor vehicle theft to a low of 12 for gun assaults and domestic violence. Homicide data were available for 23 cities. The city sample used for this report is not necessarily representative of all large cities or the nation as a whole.

The crime incident data for this report were obtained within days of the end of the study period to provide a timely snapshot of crime across the nation. As a result, these figures will likely differ from data subsequently published by individual police departments. They will also likely differ from counts released later by the FBI as part of its national crime reporting program. Data updates occur for multiple reasons. For instance, if the victim dies, an incident initially classified as an aggravated assault may be reclassified later as a homicide. For the most up-to-date information for a specific city, please visit its website.

KEY TAKEAWAY

While the current results signal a partial reversal in the crime patterns found in our earlier work, the conclusions have not changed: As the pandemic subsides, long-lasting reductions in violence and crime will require pursuing evidence-based crime-control strategies and enacting long-needed reforms to policing.

¹ The crime data were compiled through July 15, 2022. Cities that had not posted June 2022 crime data on their websites by that date (e.g., St. Louis) could not be included in this report.

Changes in Violent Offenses

HOMICIDE

Homicide is the unlawful killing of one person by another. Figure 1 displays the average monthly homicide rate in the 23 cities for which such data were available (see Appendix). The analysis identified an upward trending cyclical pattern in the homicide rate over time. The rate peaked in July of 2020, far exceeding previous peaks during the study period, amid widespread protests against police violence after George Floyd's murder in May of that year. Consistent with seasonal trends, homicide levels remained elevated through the summer, then decreased through late fall of 2020 and winter of 2021. Homicides rose again in the spring and summer of 2021, fell through fall of 2021 and winter of 2022, and then rose again in the spring of 2022, although not to the levels observed in 2020 or 2021.

Figure 1. Monthly Homicide Rate
January 2018 - June 2022

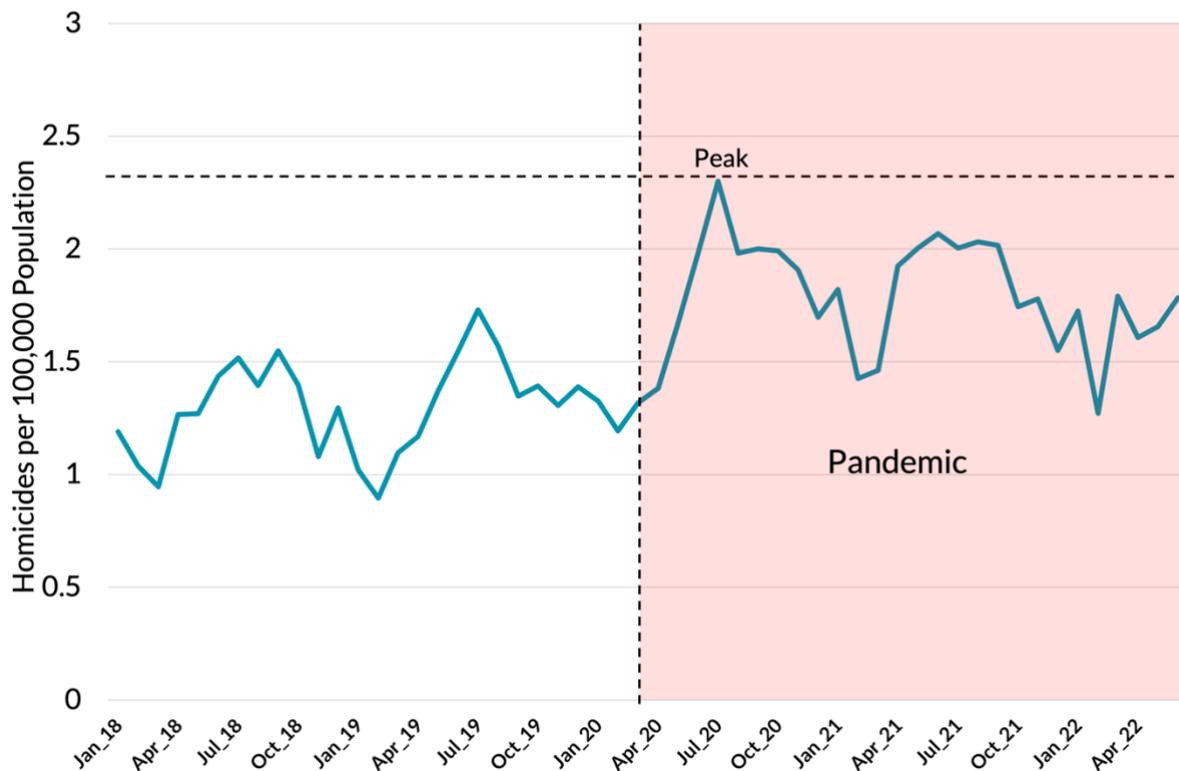
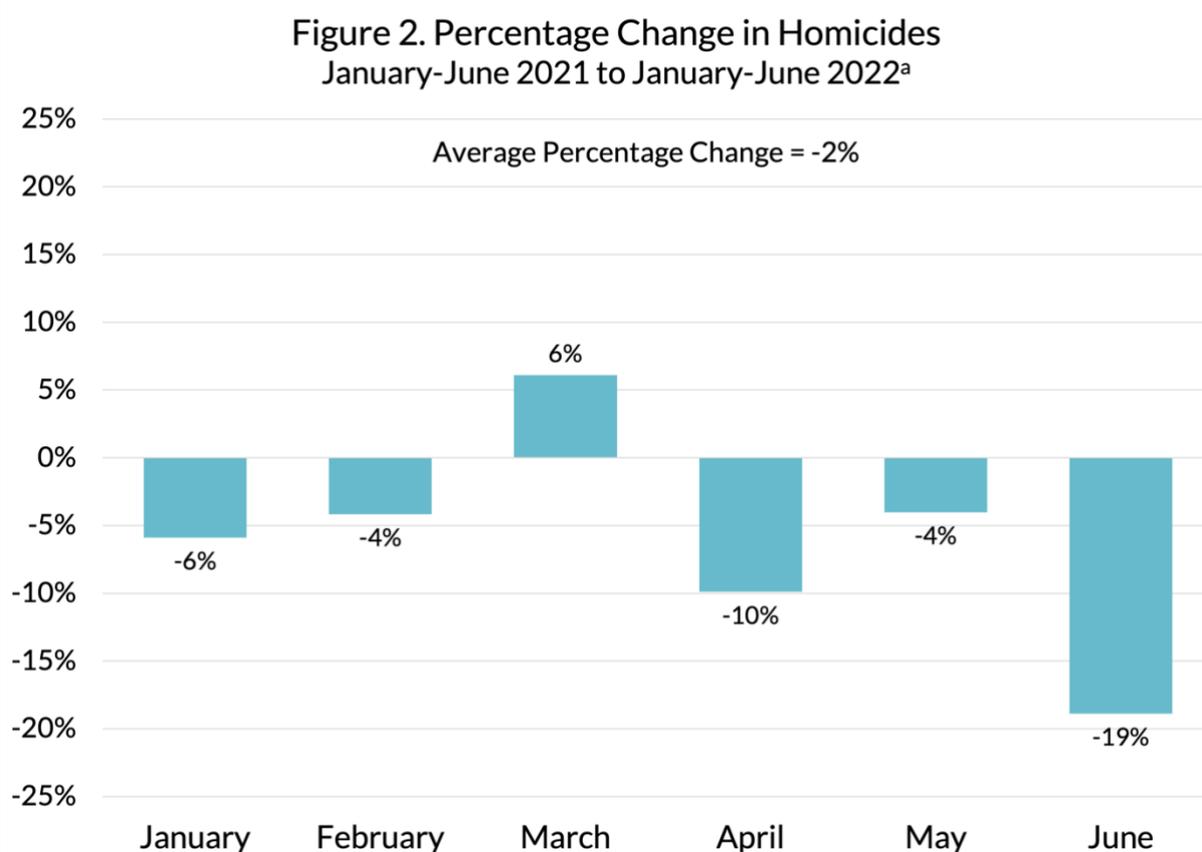


Figure 2 displays the monthly percentage change in homicides between the first six months of 2021 and the first six months of 2022. On average, there were 2% fewer homicides in the first half of 2022 than during the same period in 2021, a difference of 54 homicides.

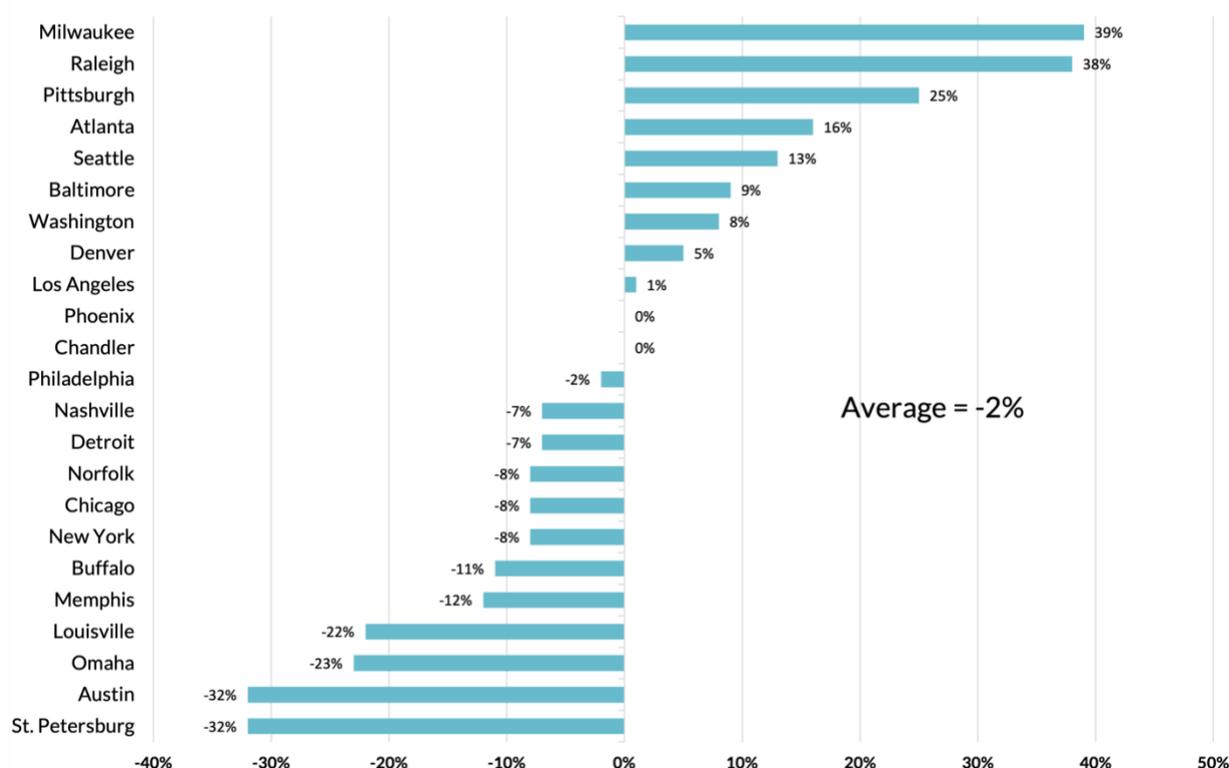
As noted in our earlier reports, the homicide increase of 2020 was historic, resulting in 1,268 more deaths in the cities studied than in 2019. That increase continued into 2021, but at a considerably slower pace. The number of homicides rose by 30% between 2019 and 2020, compared to a 5% increase between 2020 and 2021. The number then dropped by 2% during the first half of 2022 from the same period the year before. Despite that encouraging decline, the homicide rate remains 39% above the level prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (in the first half of 2019) and requires immediate action from policymakers.



^aThe average percentage change for the period (-2%) does not equal the average of the individual monthly percentage changes because final homicide counts were updated for three cities, but the corresponding monthly updates were not available.

Not all cities follow the sample-wide trend in homicide. To illuminate the variation in homicides across the 23 cities included in this study, Figure 3 shows the percentage change in the number of homicides in each city between January and June of 2021 and the same period in 2022. Nine of the cities recorded a rise in homicide, ranging from increases of 39% in Milwaukee to 1% in Los Angeles. Fourteen cities saw no change or reductions in homicide. As noted above, crime incident data for individual cities are subject to revision. For the most up-to-date information for a specific city, please visit its website.

Figure 3. Percentage Change in Homicides in 23 Cities
January-June 2021 to January-June 2022



KEY TAKEAWAY

The number of homicides was 2% lower—54 fewer homicides—during the first half of 2022 than in the first half of 2021.

AGGRAVATED ASSAULT

Aggravated assaults are assaults committed with a deadly weapon or those that result in or threaten serious bodily injury to the victim. As shown in Figure 4, the average monthly aggravated assault rate in the 19 cities with available data exhibited a clear cyclical pattern over time, rising during the late spring and summer months and falling during the fall and winter. Like the homicide rate, the aggravated assault rate peaked during the summer of 2020 at levels that surpassed those of previous highs. The rate then fell through the remainder of the year, before rising again during the first half of 2021 and falling during the second half. The number of aggravated assaults during the first half of 2022 was 4% higher on average than during the same period in 2021 – 1,587 more aggravated assaults in the cities that reported data (see Figure 5).

Figure 4. Monthly Aggravated Assault Rate
January 2018 - June 2022

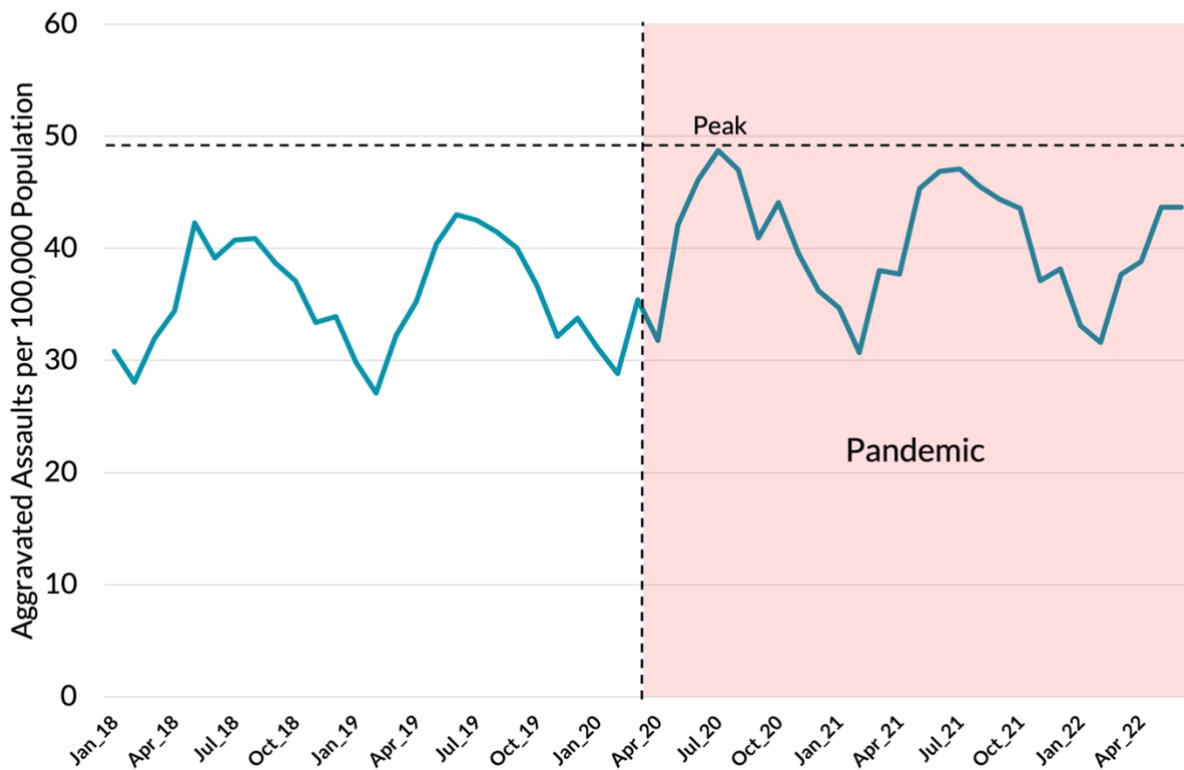
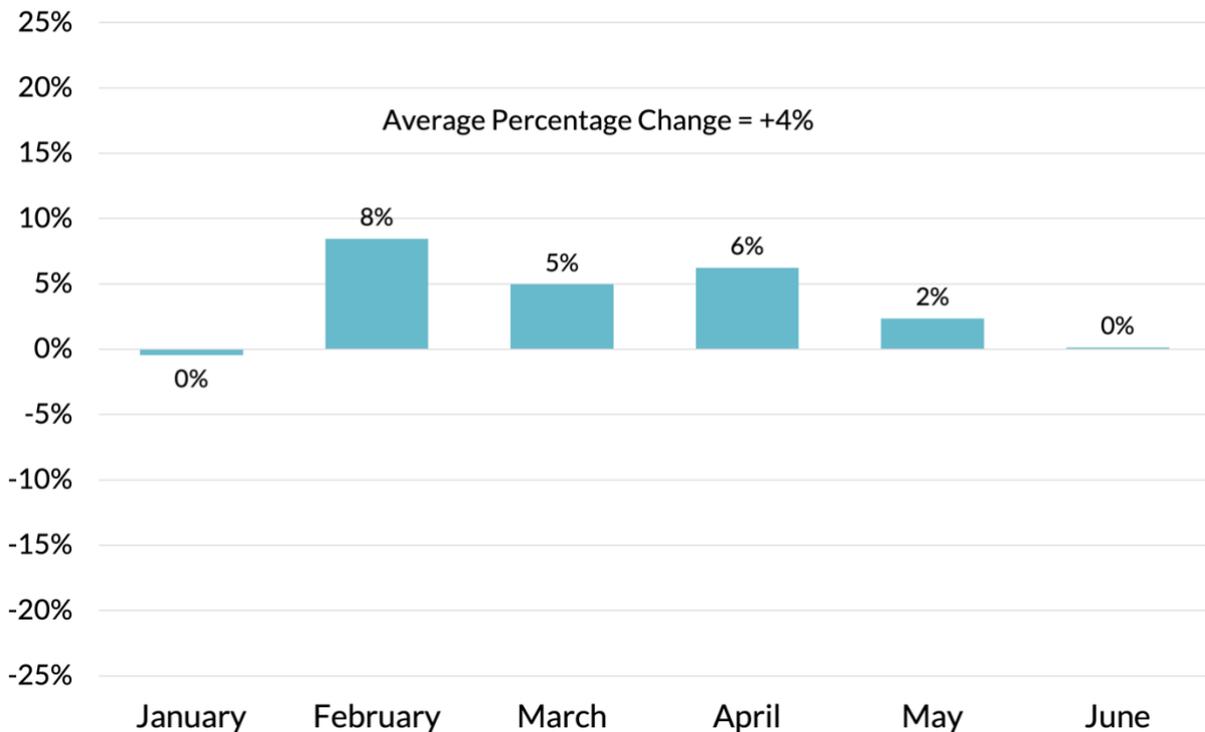


Figure 5. Percentage Change in Aggravated Assaults
January–June 2021 to January–June 2022



KEY TAKEAWAY

The number of aggravated assaults was 4% higher during the first half of 2022—1,587 more aggravated assaults—than the year before.

GUN ASSAULT

Gun assaults are aggravated assaults committed with a firearm. As shown in Figure 6, the monthly gun assault rate in the 12 cities with available data exhibited a cyclical trend over time. It peaked during the summer of 2020 and peaked again in the spring and summer of 2021 before falling through the remainder of the year. Similar to the trend for homicides, gun assaults fell by 6% on average during the first half of 2022 compared to the first half of 2021—a decrease of 747 gun assaults in the study cities (see Figure 7). Given the small number of cities on which these results are based, they should be viewed with caution.

Figure 6. Monthly Gun Assault Rate
January 2018 - June 2022

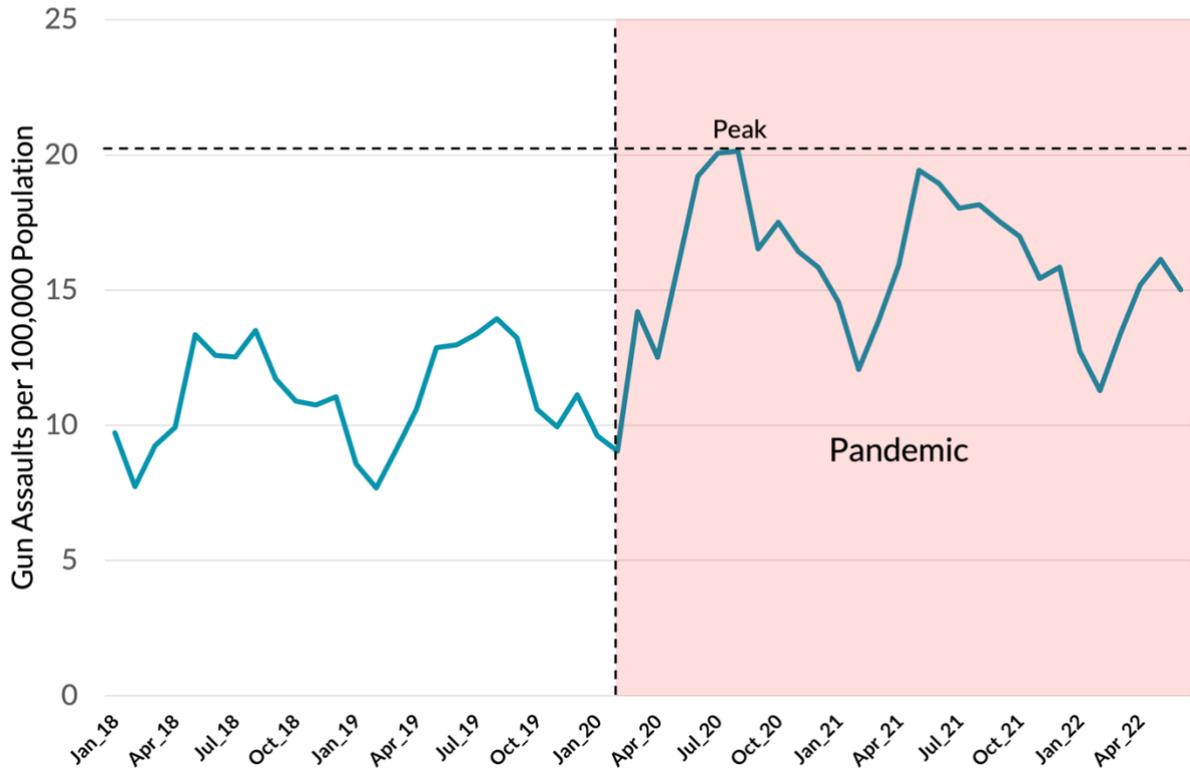
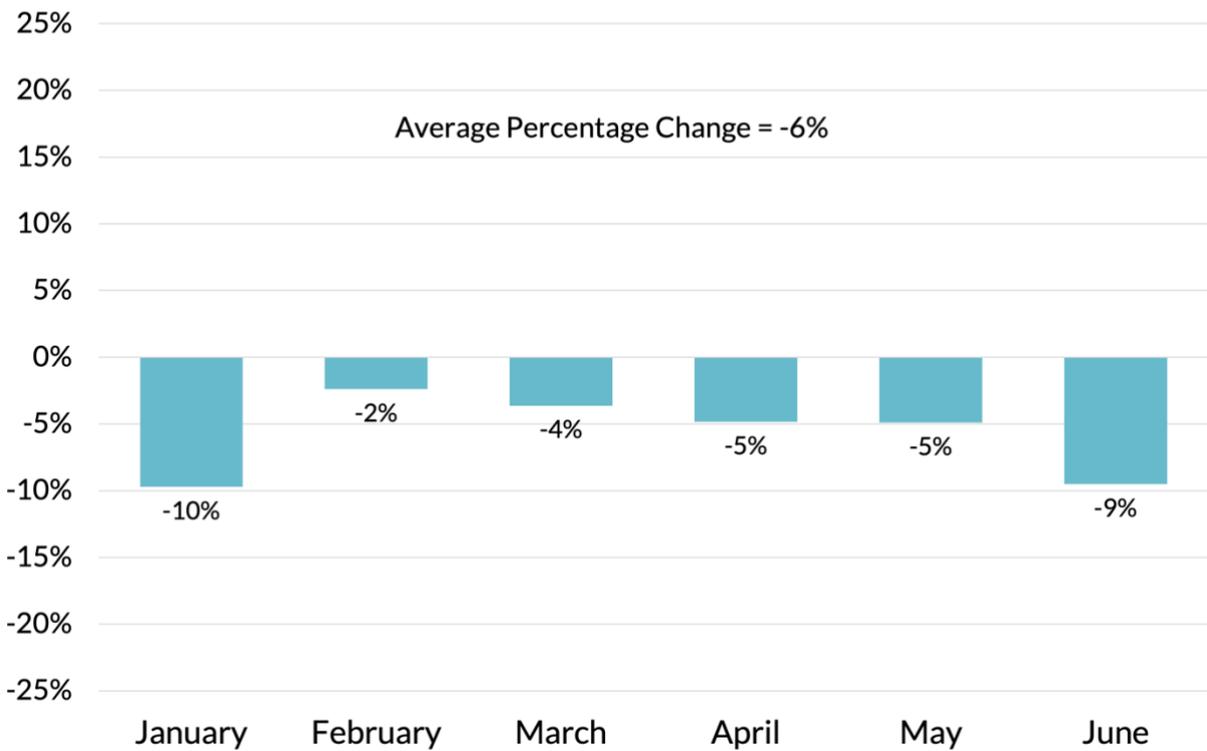


Figure 7. Percentage Change in Gun Assaults
January-June 2021 to January-June 2022



KEY TAKEAWAY

The number of gun assaults fell by 6% on average during the first half of 2022 from the first half of 2021—747 fewer gun assaults. These results should be viewed with caution because they are based on data from just 12 cities.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence consists primarily of aggravated and so-called simple assaults committed against domestic partners or family members. The monthly domestic violence rate, displayed in Figure 8, exhibited a cyclical pattern and a small downward trend over time that persisted through the first half of 2022. There were 2,102 fewer domestic violence incidents during the first half of 2022 than during the same period in 2021, an average decrease of 5%, as shown in Figure 9. These results should be viewed with caution because they are based on only 12 cities for which domestic violence data were available. In addition, a previously released CCJ [systematic review](#) documented an 8.1% increase in domestic violence incidents after jurisdictions imposed pandemic-related lockdown orders in the spring of 2020.

Figure 8. Monthly Domestic Violence Rate
January 2018 - June 2022

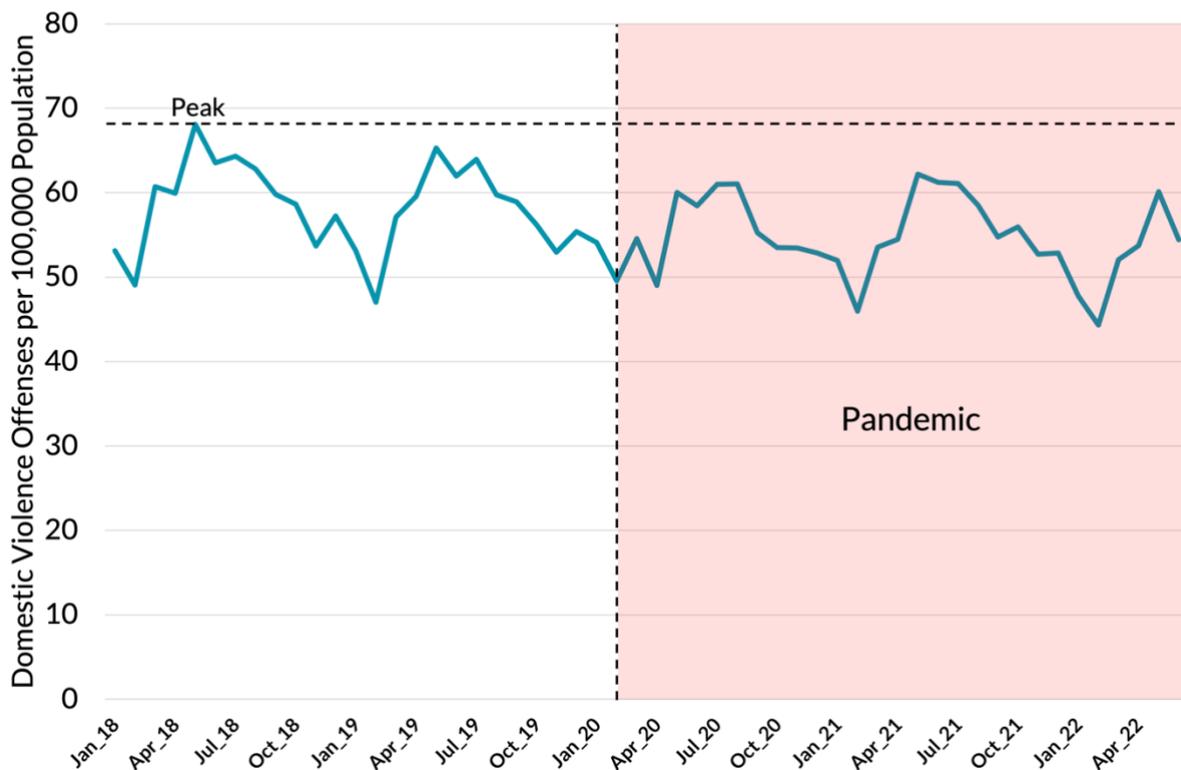
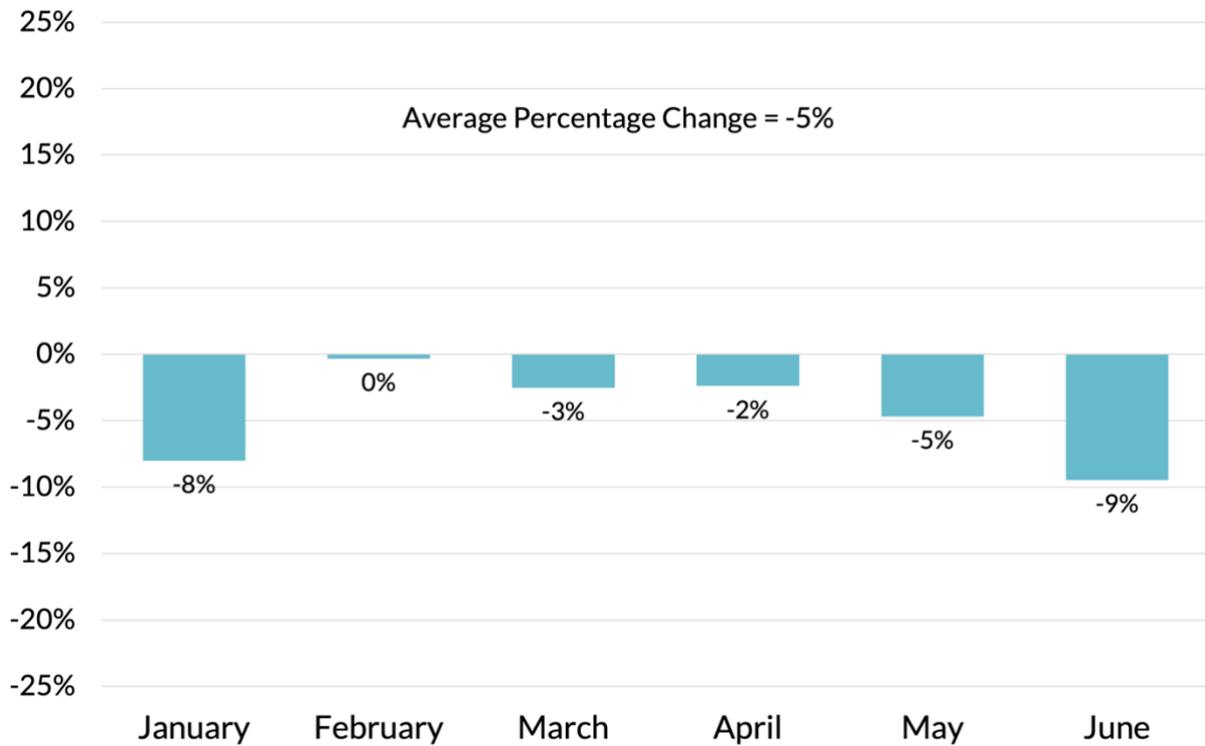


Figure 9. Percentage Change in Domestic Violence
January-June 2021 to January-June 2022



KEY TAKEAWAY

The number of domestic violence offenses was 5% lower in the first half of 2022 than the year before—2,102 fewer offenses. These results should be viewed with caution because they are based on data from just 12 cities.

ROBBERY

Robberies are thefts committed with force or the threat of force. The average monthly robbery rate in the 26 cities with available data was lower during the first two years of the pandemic than during the preceding two years, as shown in Figure 10. Robberies began to increase by the end of 2021, however, and that increase accelerated during the first half of 2022. There were 5,226 more robberies in the study cities during the first six months of 2022, a 19% average increase over the same period in 2021 (see Figure 11).

Figure 10. Monthly Robbery Rate
January 2018 - June 2022

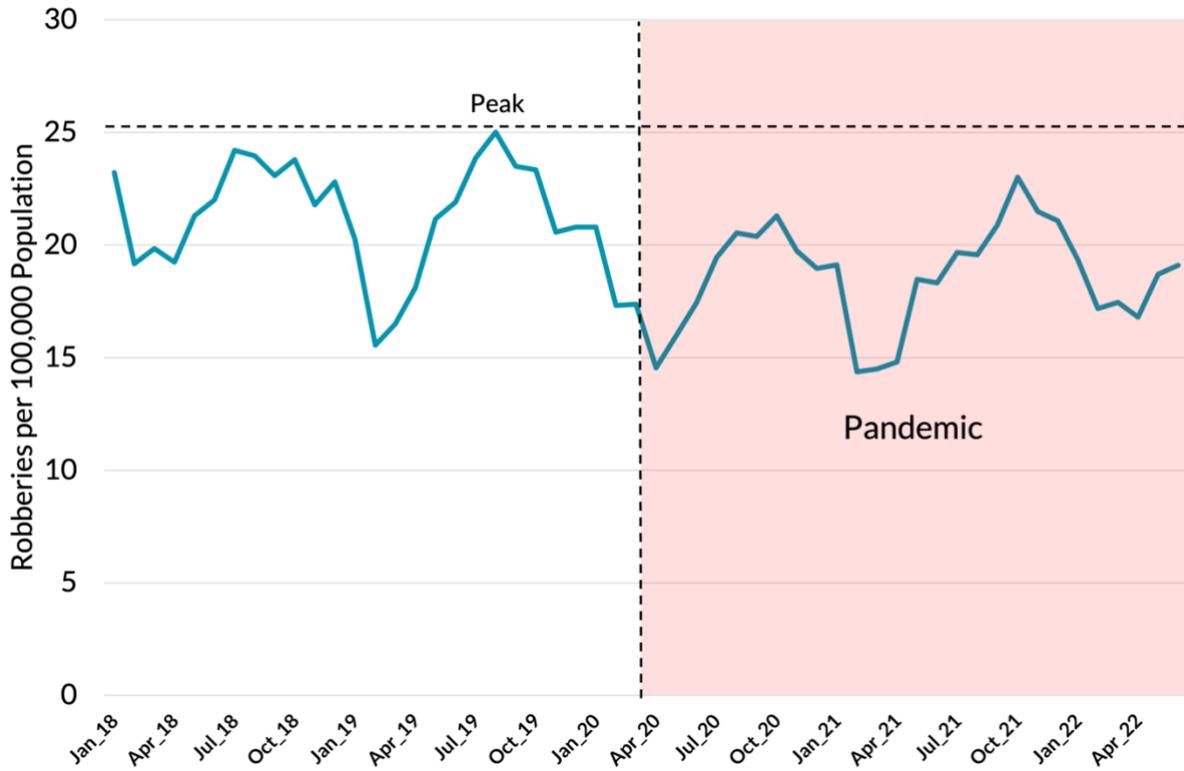
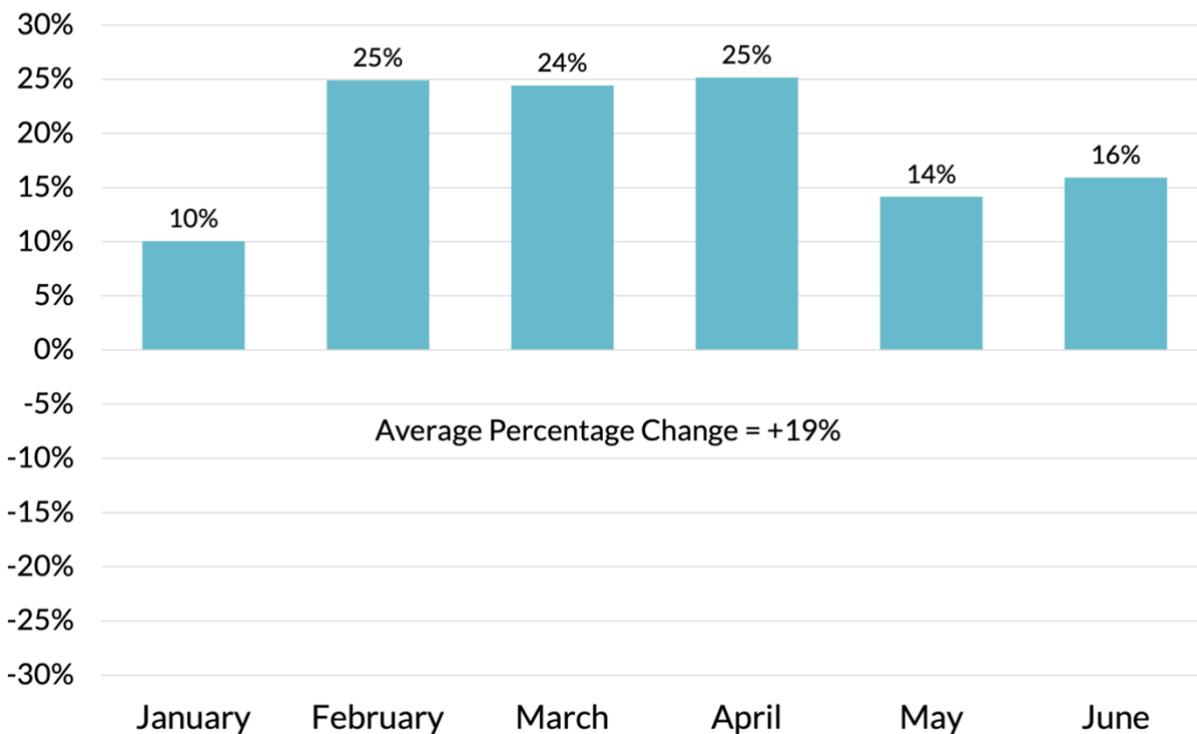


Figure 11. Percentage Change in Robberies
January-June 2021 to January-June 2022



KEY TAKEAWAY

The number of robberies was 19% higher—5,226 more robberies—during the first half of 2022 than in the first half of 2021.

Changes in Property and Drug Offenses

RESIDENTIAL BURGLARY

Burglaries involve breaking and entering a residential or commercial premise for the purpose of committing a crime. As shown in Figure 12, in 2020 and 2021, the average monthly residential burglary rate in the 16 cities with available data exhibited a downward cyclical trend over time. In the first half of 2022, however, this pattern changed. There were 1,034 more residential burglaries in the first half of this year than during the first half of 2021, a 6% average increase in the study cities (see Figure 13).

Figure 12. Monthly Residential Burglary Rate
January 2018 - June 2022

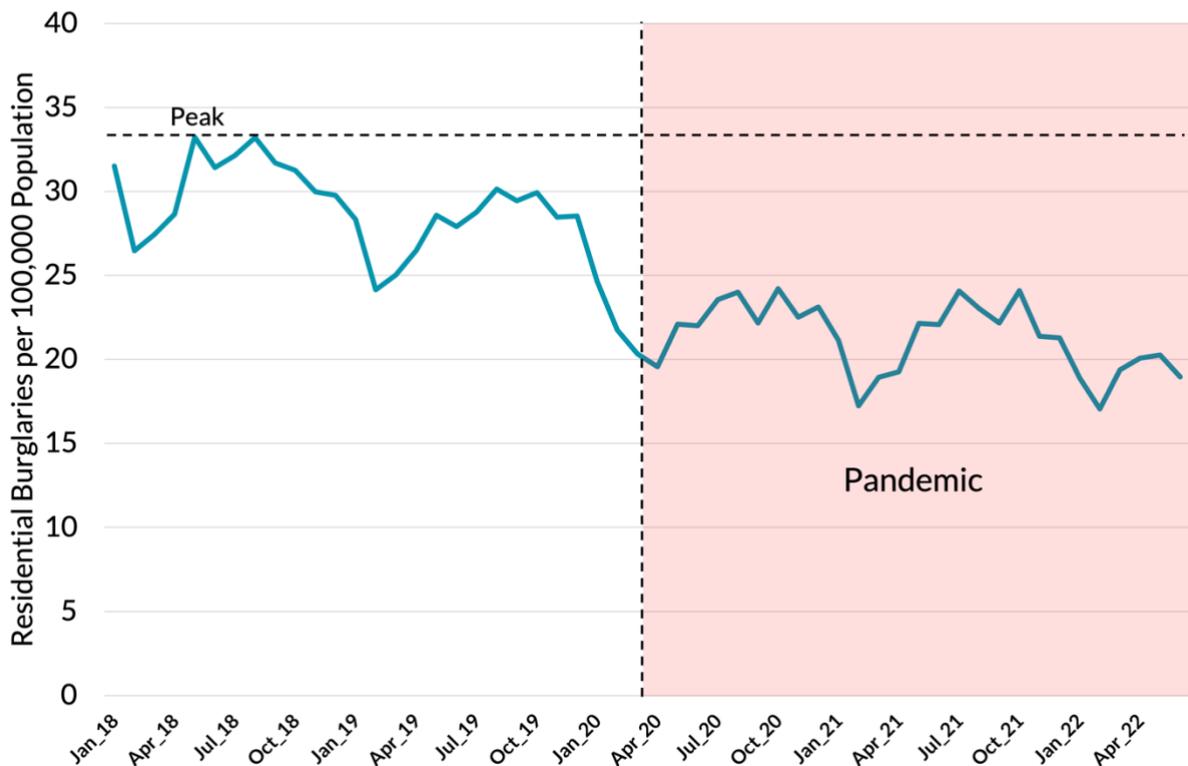
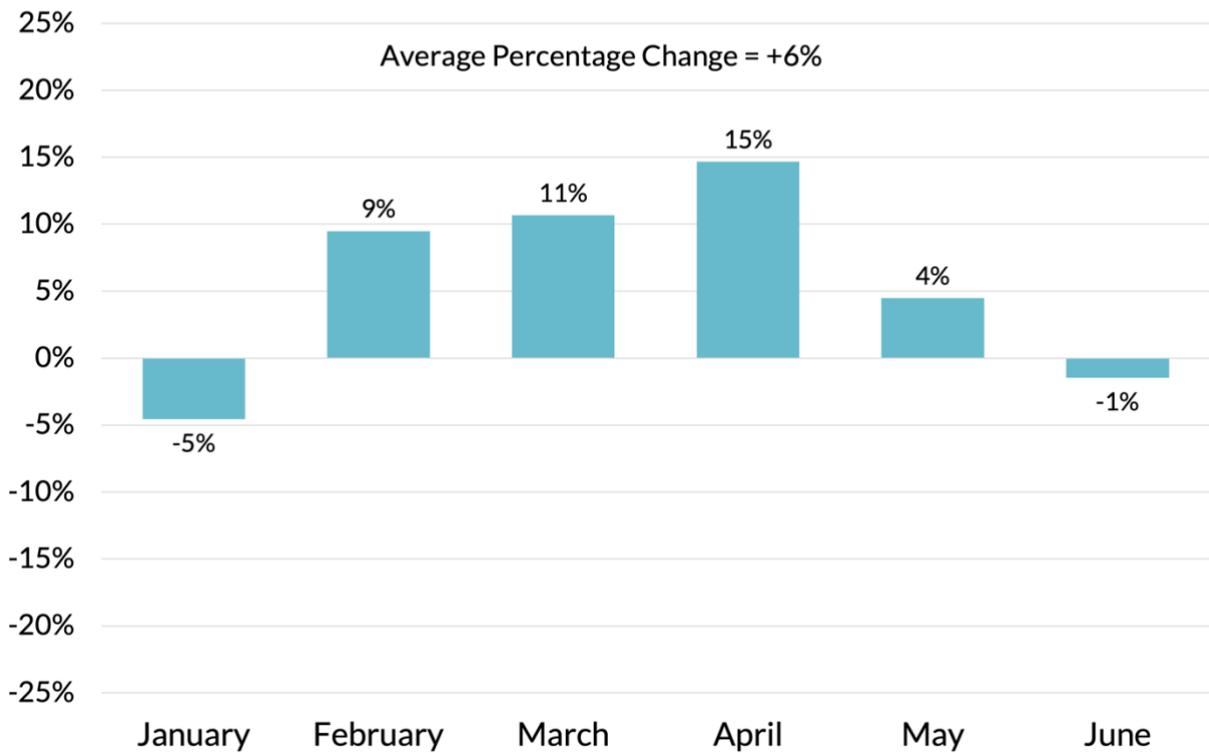


Figure 13. Percentage Change in Residential Burglaries
January-June 2021 to January-June 2022



KEY TAKEAWAY

The number of residential burglaries was 6% higher—1,034 more residential burglaries—during the first half of 2022 than in the first half of 2021.

NONRESIDENTIAL BURGLARY

In the 16 cities with available data, the monthly nonresidential burglary rate exhibited a flat cyclical pattern before the pandemic and decreased during the first two years of the pandemic, as shown in Figure 14. The number of nonresidential burglaries then rose by 8% on average from the first half of 2021 to the first half of 2022, an increase of 8,712 nonresidential burglaries (see Figure 15).

Figure 14. Monthly Nonresidential Burglary Rate
January 2018 - June 2022

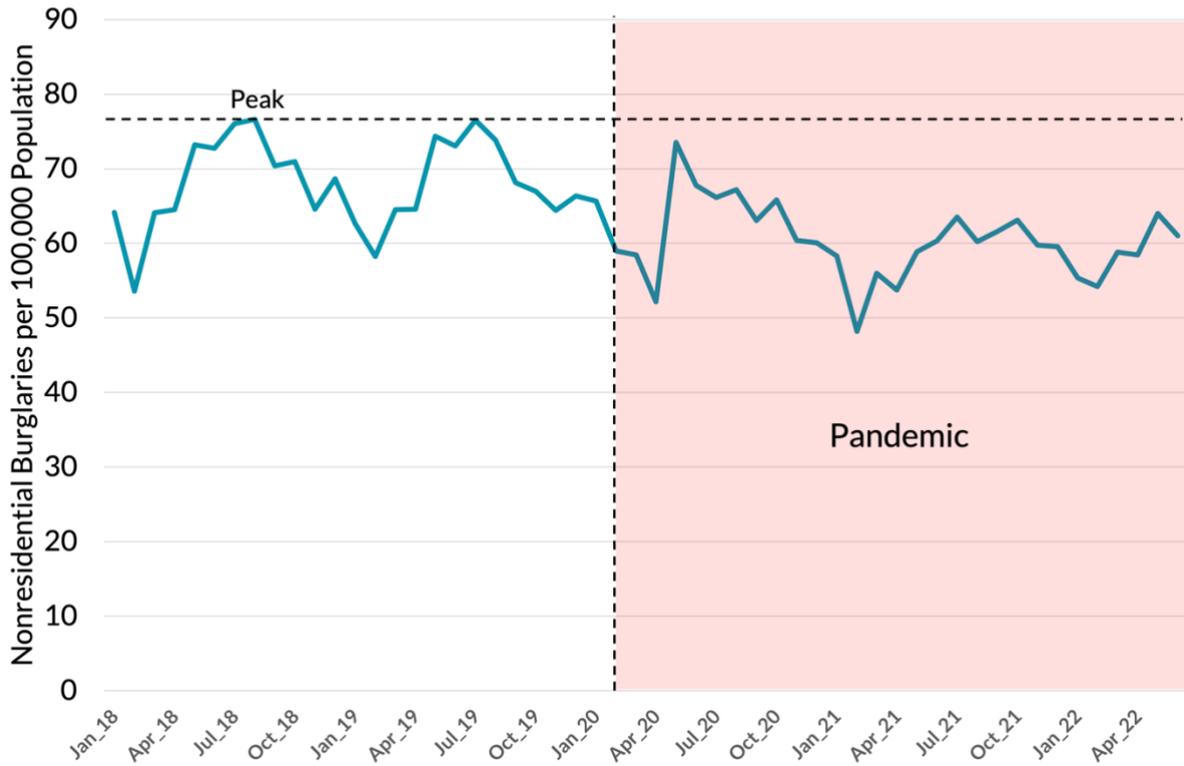
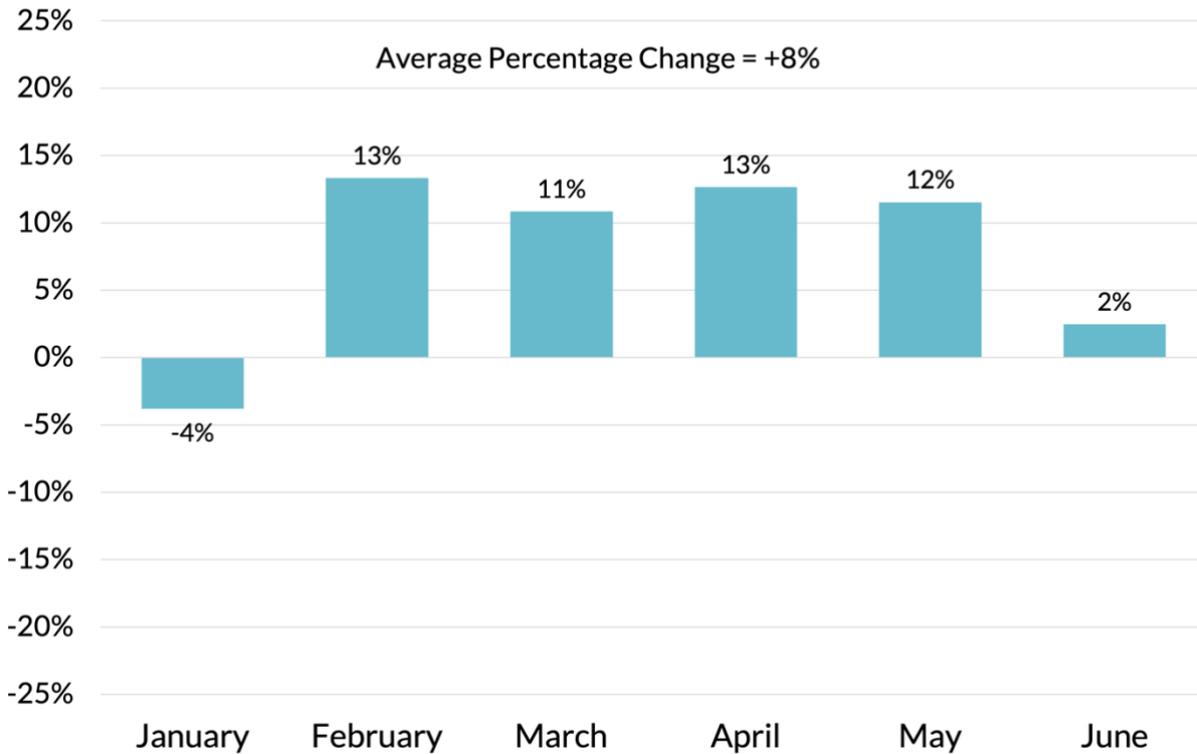


Figure 15. Percentage Change in Nonresidential Burglaries
January-June 2021 to January-June 2022



KEY TAKEAWAY

Nonresidential burglaries rose by 8%—8,712 more nonresidential burglaries—in the first half of 2022 over the first half of 2021.

LARCENY

Larcenies are thefts unaccompanied by force or breaking and entering. The average monthly larceny rate exhibited a distinct cyclical pattern over time, as shown in Figure 16. The larceny rate in the 25 cities with available data was lower during the first year of the pandemic than during the prior two years. But this decline slowed almost to a halt in 2021 and larcenies rose by 20% on average during the first half of 2022 compared to the first half of 2021, an increase of 45,104 larcenies in the study cities (see Figure 17.)

Figure 16. Monthly Larceny Rate
January 2018 - June 2022

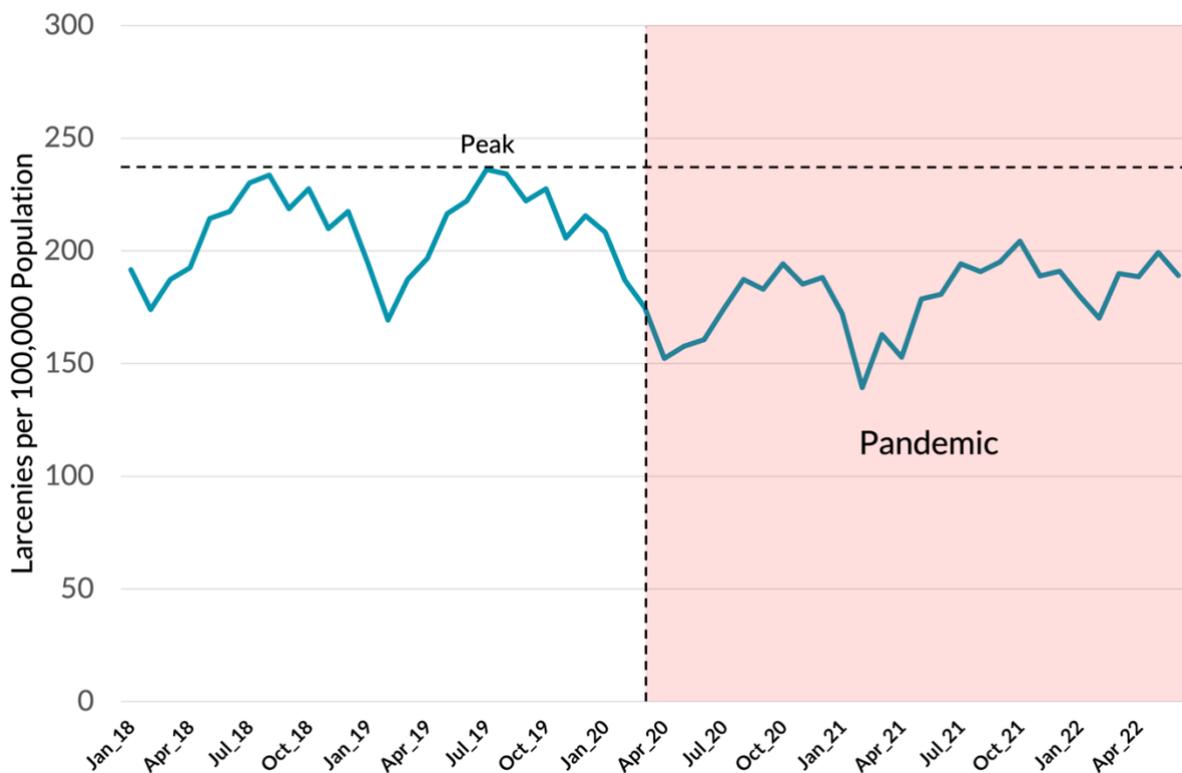
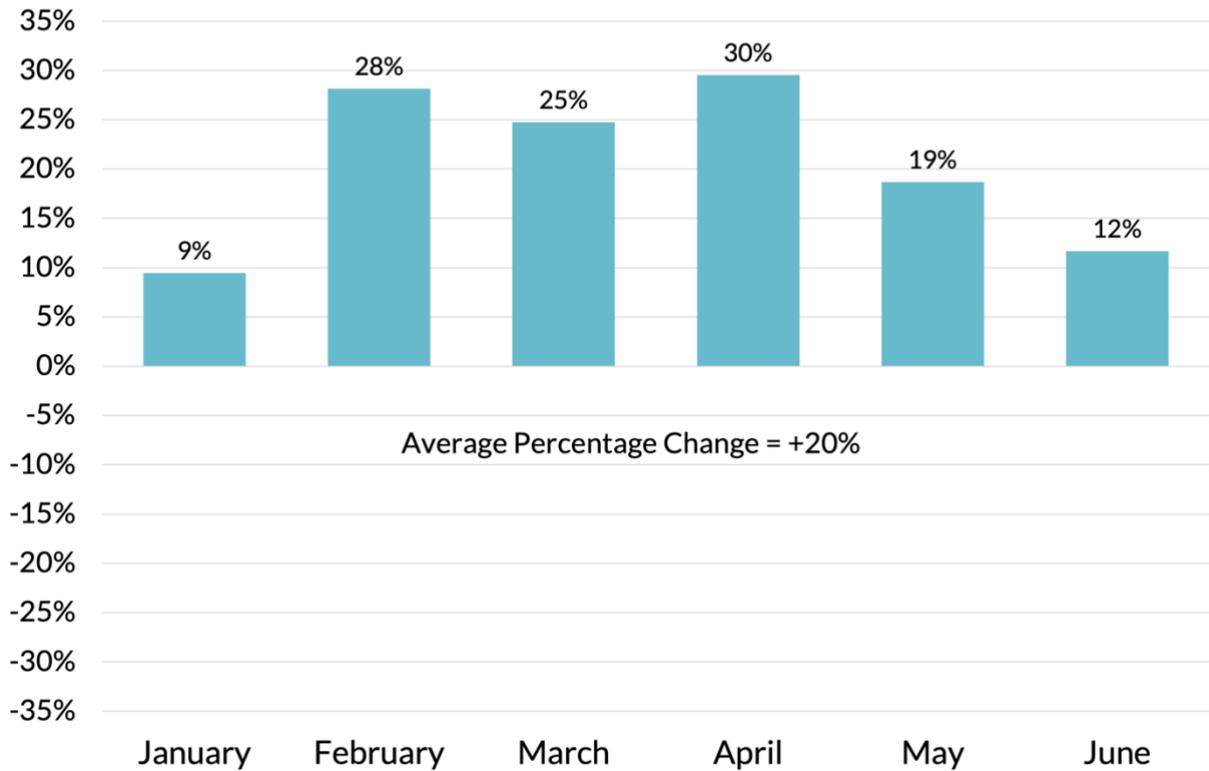


Figure 17. Percentage Change in Larcenies
January-June 2021 to January-June 2022



KEY TAKEAWAY

The number of larcenies was 20% higher—45,104 more larcenies—during first half of 2022 than the year before.

MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT

The average monthly motor vehicle theft rate rose and fell cyclically with no evident linear trend from January 2018 to the end of May 2020 in the 26 cities with available data, as shown in Figure 18. It then rose, with seasonal fluctuations, to a peak in June of 2022. There were 10,535 more motor vehicle thefts in those cities during the first half of 2022 than in the first half of 2021, amounting to an average increase of 15% over 2021 (see Figure 19).

Figure 18. Monthly Motor Vehicle Theft Rate
January 2018 - June 2022

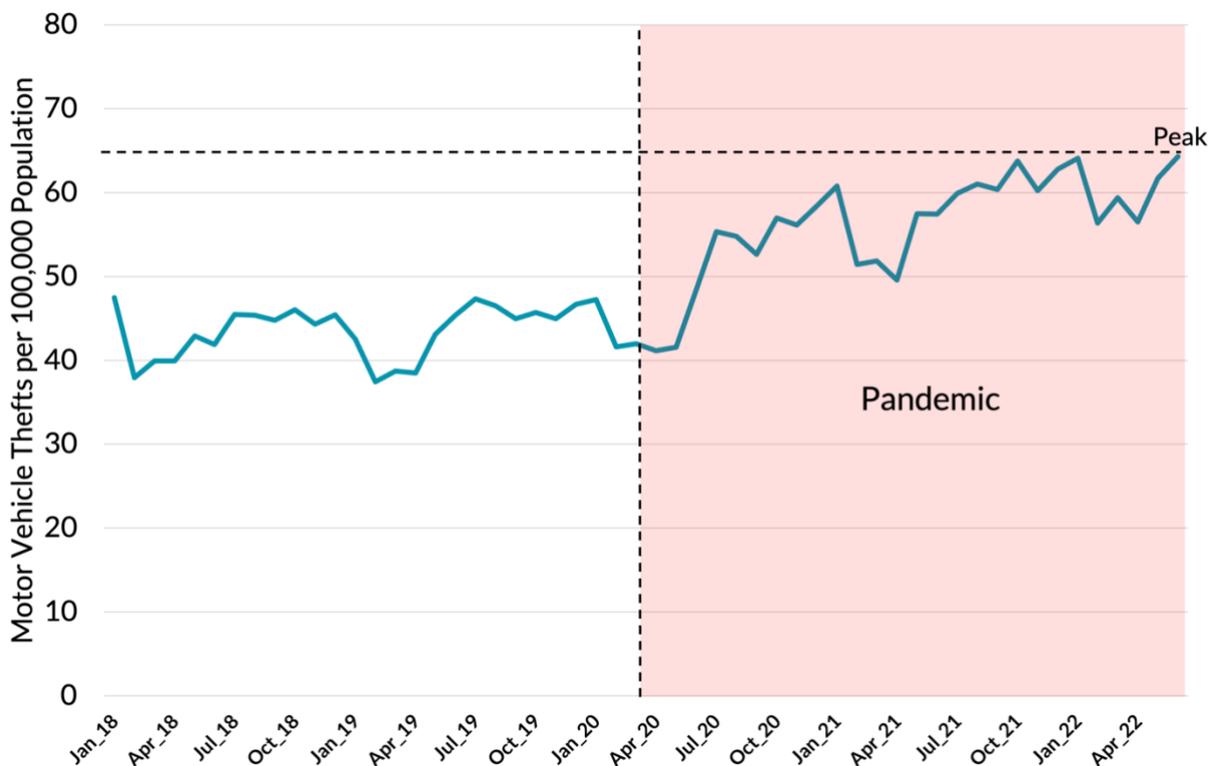
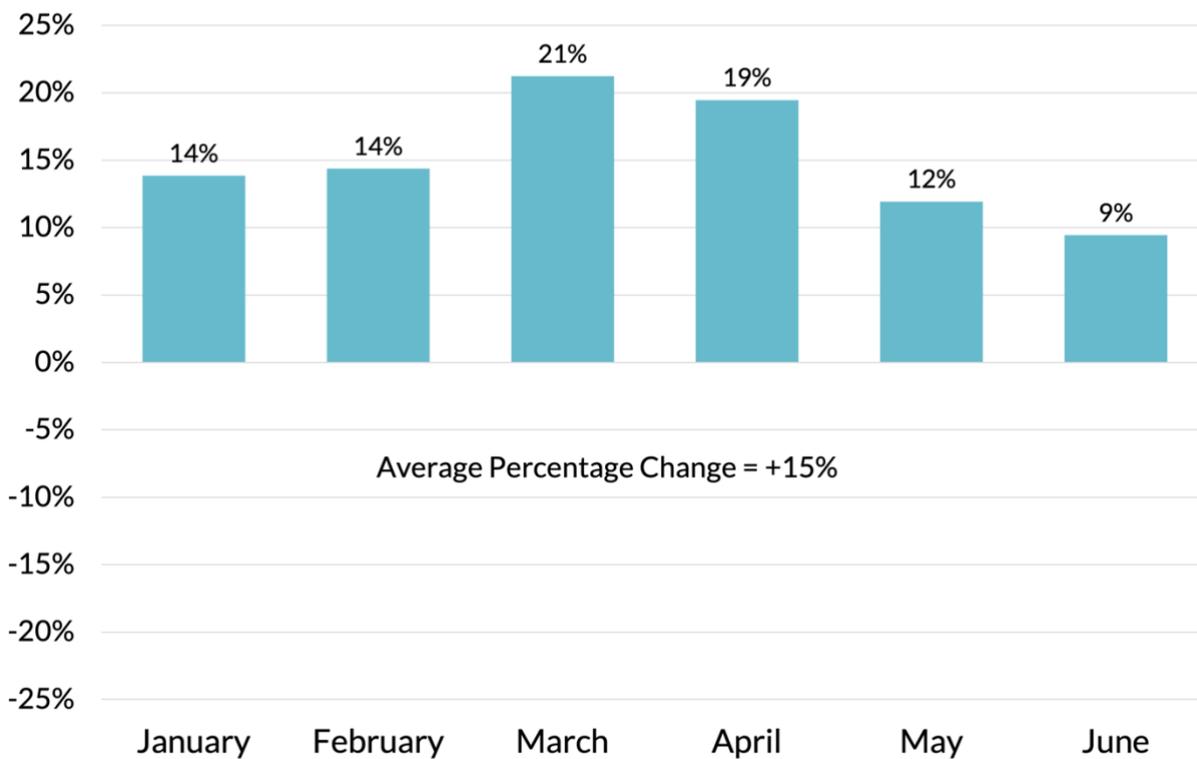


Figure 19. Percentage Change in Motor Vehicle Thefts
January-June 2021 to January-June 2022



KEY TAKEAWAY

The number of motor vehicle thefts was 15% greater—10,535 more motor vehicle thefts—during the first half of 2022 than the year before.

DRUG OFFENSES

Drug offenses include arrests for the manufacture, sale, or possession of illicit drugs. The average weekly drug offense rate in the 19 cities with available data dropped during the pandemic to a level lower than at any time since the beginning of 2018 (see Figure 20). There were 2,539 fewer drug offenses in those cities during the first half of 2022 than in the first half of 2021, an average decrease of 7% from 2021 (see Figure 21).

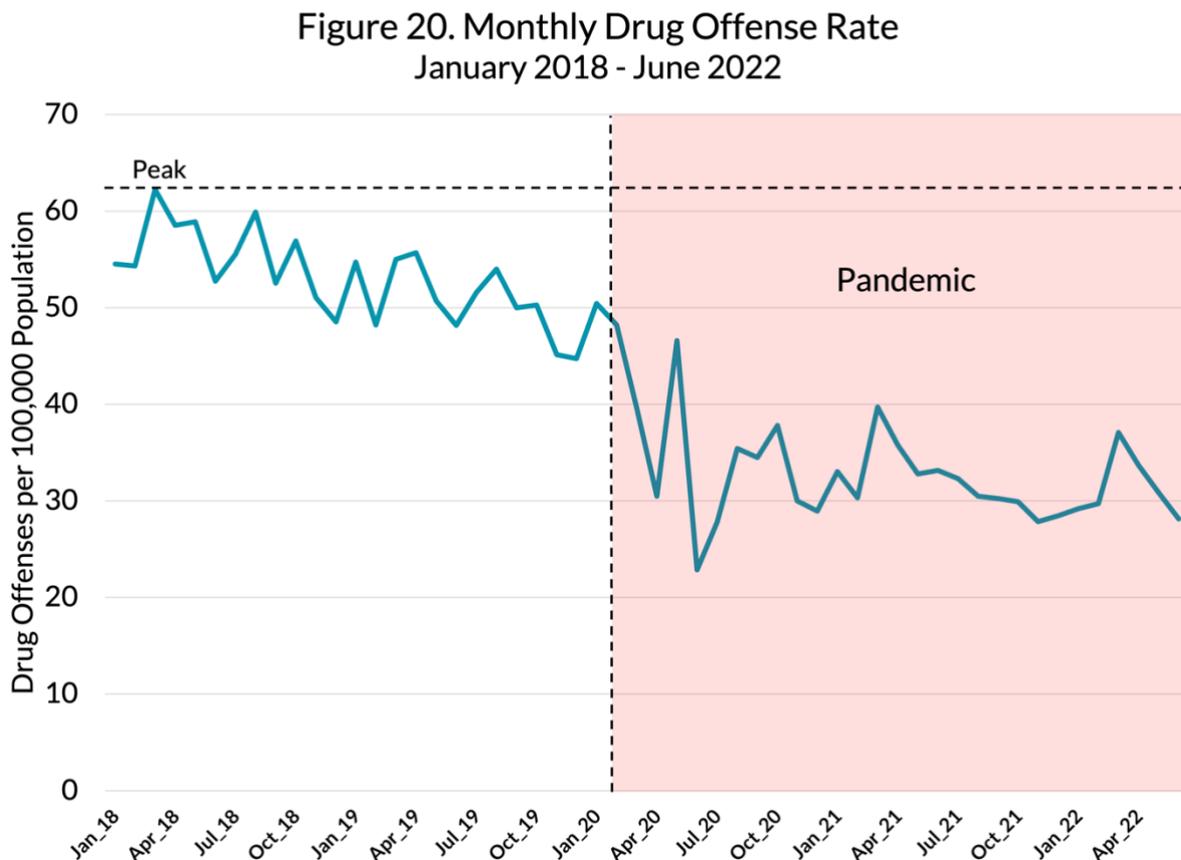
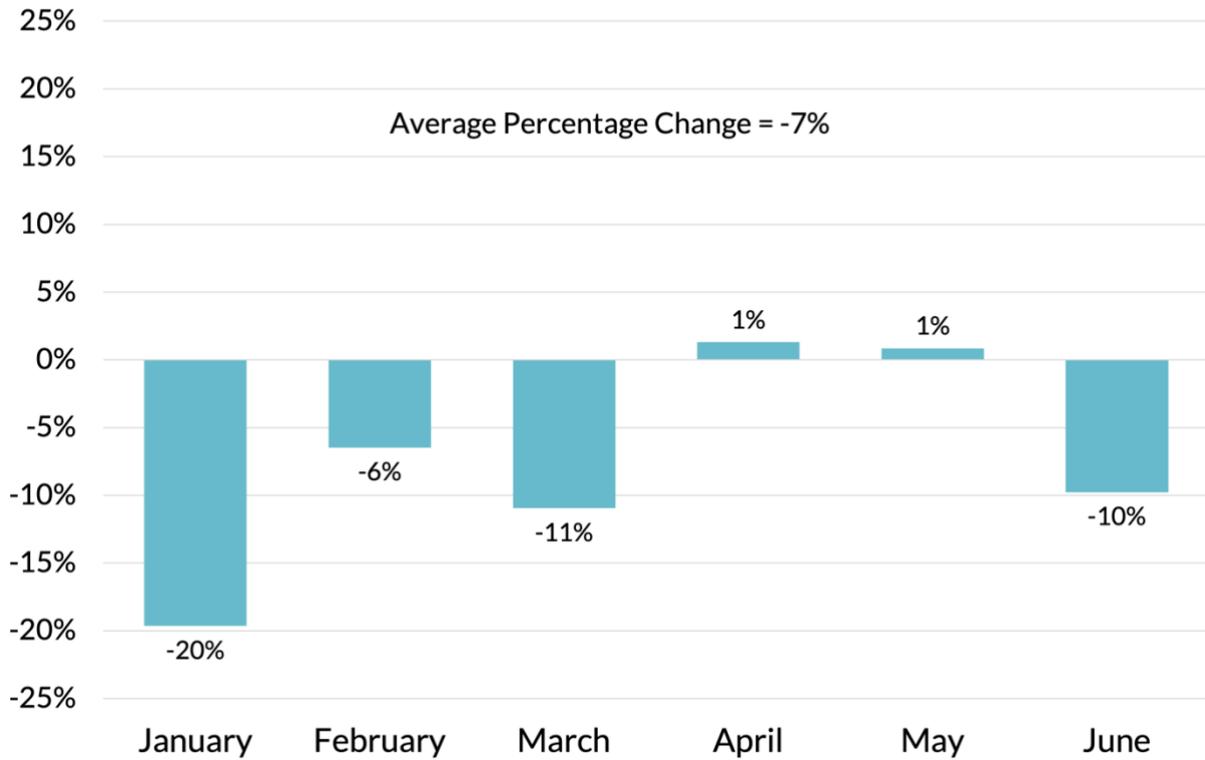


Figure 21. Percentage Change in Drug Offenses
January-June 2021 to January-June 2022



KEY TAKEAWAY

The number of drug offenses was 7% lower—2,539 fewer drug offenses—during the first half of 2022 than during the first half of 2021.

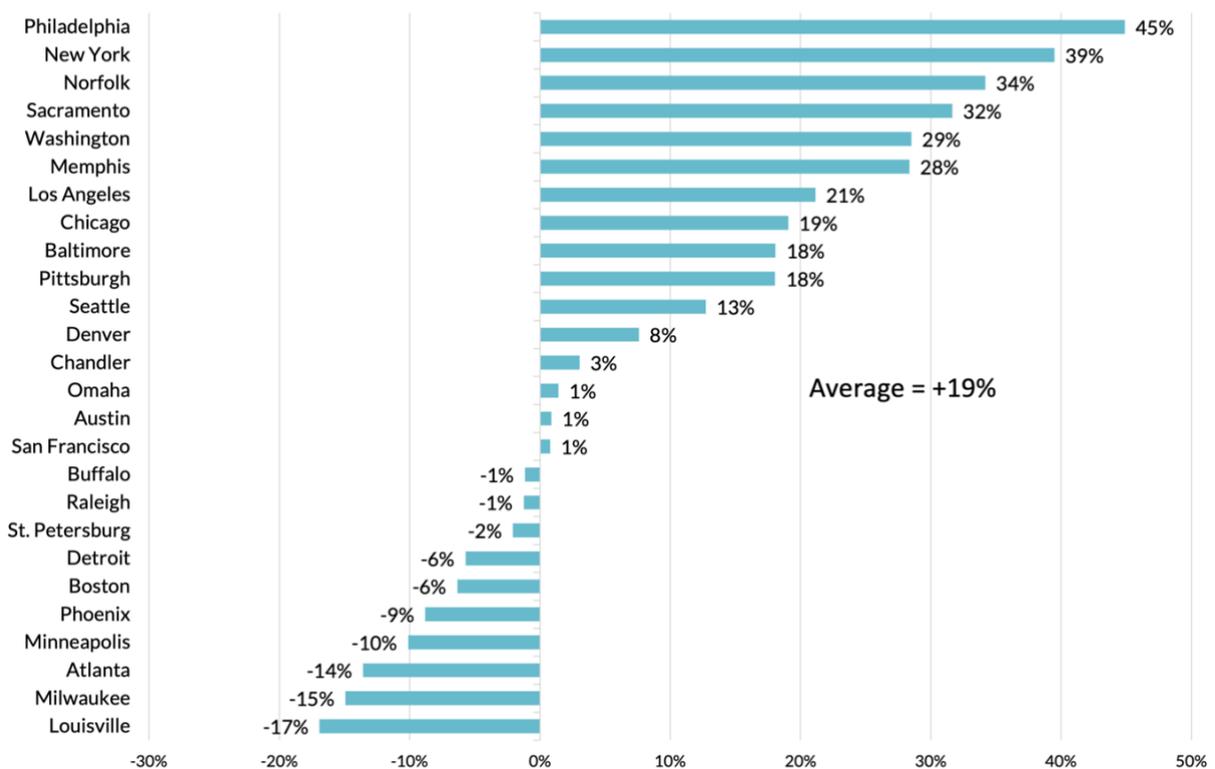
A Closer Look at Robbery and Larceny

In recent months, concerns have risen about an increase in robbery and retail theft. Reports highlighting outbreaks of shoplifting and “smash-and-grab” episodes have centered mainly on [a few cities](#), including San Francisco, Chicago, and New York. Beyond anecdotal reports, is there an increase in robbery and theft? If so, is this problem primarily experienced by the small number of cities where it has been publicized, or has it become a nationwide phenomenon? The data gathered for this report shed some light on these questions.

Robberies rose in 16 of the 26 cities with available data between the first six months of 2021 and the same period in 2022, as shown in Figure 22. Philadelphia and New York led the way with increases of 45% and 39%, respectively, but smaller cities such

as Norfolk, Sacramento, and Memphis also saw sizable increases. For the 26-city sample overall, the number of robberies that occurred during the first half of 2022 exceeded the number committed before the pandemic in the first half of 2019 (31,894 in 2019 and 33,442 in 2022, a 4.8% increase). However, the trend in robberies is far from uniform across the study cities, with 10 cities showing decreases ranging from 1% to 17%.

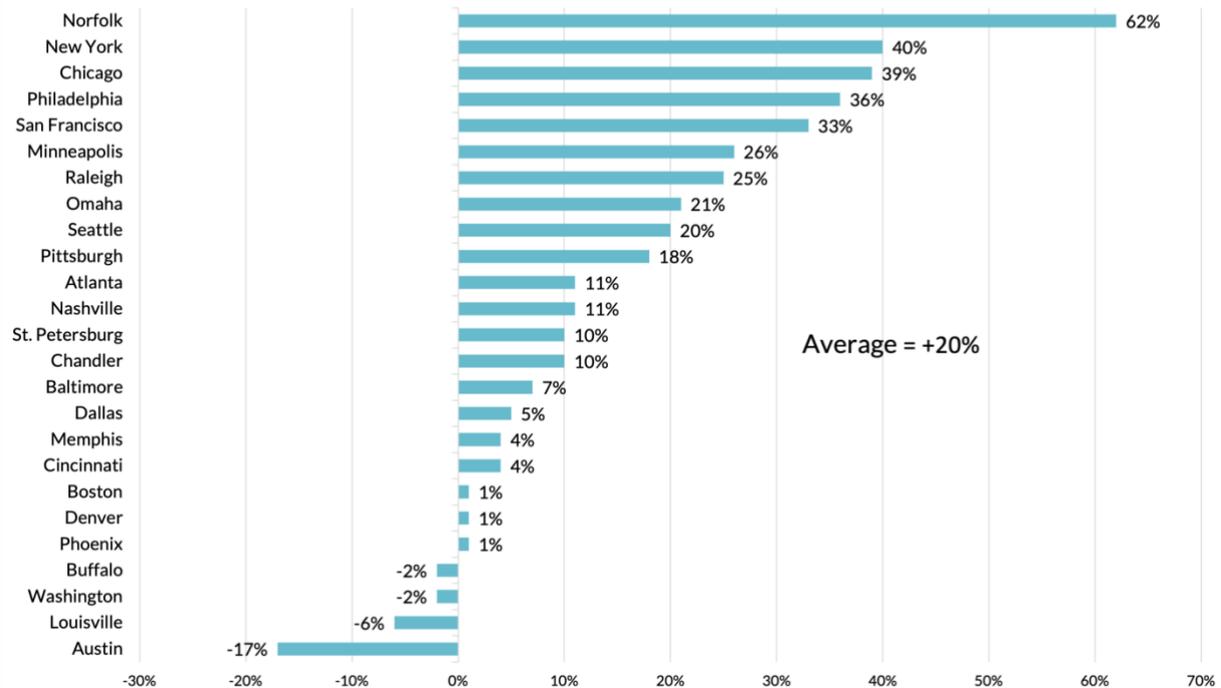
**Figure 22. Percentage Change in Robberies in 26 Cities
January-June 2021 to January-June 2022**



Larcenies are by far the most numerous of the offenses covered in this report. Shoplifting constitutes a [large proportion of larcenies](#), second only to thefts from motor vehicles. Figure 23 displays the percentage change in larcenies from the first half of 2021 to the first half of 2022 in the 25 cities with available data. The recent increase in larceny is clearly not limited to a few cities. Twenty-one of the 25 cities saw increases in larceny in 2022, ranging from just 1% in Boston, Denver, and Phoenix to a jump of 62% in Norfolk. The three largest cities in the sample – New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia – all had increases well above the average increase of 20%, but smaller cities such as Omaha, Raleigh, and Minneapolis also experienced sizable increases in larceny. As with robbery, the number of larcenies in the first half of 2022 was slightly higher than the number three years before (270,126 in 2019 and 272,496 in 2022, a .9% increase).

As noted previously, crime incident data for individual cities are subject to revision over time. For the most up-to-date information for a specific city, please visit its website.

Figure 23. Percentage Change in Larcenies in 25 Cities
January-June 2021 to January-June 2022



Conclusion

This study is the ninth in a series of reports exploring crime changes during the coronavirus pandemic for CCJ. Updating that earlier work, this analysis reveals both increases and decreases in crime rates in a sample of U.S. cities during the first half of 2022 compared to the first half of 2021.

Reversing earlier trends, homicides and gun assaults declined during the first half of 2022 compared to the same period in 2021. Domestic violence incidents also decreased during the first half of 2022, but this result should be viewed with caution. The drop in homicide and gun violence could reflect some easing of the stress and dislocations associated with the pandemic, and decreases in the social unrest that followed George Floyd's murder. However, aggravated assaults rose slightly in the first six months of 2022, and homicide and gun assault rates remain substantially higher than prior to the pandemic. Violent crime continues to warrant serious attention from policymakers.

In the case of robbery and most property crimes, there is another reversal of previous trends, but in the opposite direction: After falling during the first two years of the pandemic, robberies, burglaries, and larcenies increased between January and June of 2022 relative to the same period in 2021. Motor vehicle thefts also rose, but that increase began during the early months of the pandemic.² The number of drug offenses declined in the first part of 2022, as it did in previous years.

The recent uptick in crimes committed to acquire money or property from a victim could reflect a return to somewhat normal living conditions, even as new variants of COVID have emerged. Opportunities for retail theft and commercial robberies have increased as shops have reopened. Likewise, more people on the streets means more targets exist for street robbers. Another factor may be the emergence of new, destabilizing economic conditions, such as the rise in food, fuel, and housing prices that began in the final months of 2021 and accelerated sharply in the first half of 2022. The reduction of enforcement actions against certain property offenses due to the legacy of the pandemic, or for other reasons, may have contributed to the increase in larcenies in some cities, but likely did not fuel increases in the violent crime of robbery. It will take time to unravel the causes of the increases in acquisitive crimes, but no time should be wasted in mitigating their consequences.

Homicides and gun violence should continue to be the nation's top criminal justice policy priority. Evidence-based strategies are available to address high rates of homicide and gun violence in the short and medium term. Comprehensive enforcement, prevention, and intervention efforts that focus on the specific people and places where violence concentrates should be redoubled. The anti-violence initiatives of street outreach workers and other non-police actors who engage directly with those at the highest risk for violence must also be strengthened and sustained. CCJ's Violent Crime Working Group produced a roadmap of [10 essential actions](#) that cities can take now to reduce violence and save lives, without the need for new laws or enormous expenditures.

The rise in acquisitive crime – which constitutes the bulk of the crime problem for the vast majority of Americans – requires heightened attention from law enforcement and policymakers as well. Strategies that reduce violence may also be effective against acquisitive crime, which, like violent crime, is spatially concentrated. In addition, congressional action may help stem the rising tide of larcenies in U.S. cities. A [bill](#) introduced in the House of Representatives in October of 2021 would require the disclosure of financial and contact information by large sellers of merchandise and enable consumers to report suspicious activity in online marketplaces, where large quantities of stolen goods land. Increasing the difficulty of selling stolen merchandise may deter some forms of organized retail theft.

Anti-crime efforts should occur in tandem with long-term reforms to strengthen accountability for police misconduct, increase procedural justice in policing, and shift some current police functions away from law enforcement. Addressing the day-to-

² See the [2021 year-end report](#) by the Council on Criminal Justice for a discussion of the increase in motor vehicle thefts.

day problems of the homeless and responding to drug overdoses, for example, are responsibilities that other agencies and organizations are often better equipped to handle, and offloading those functions would permit the police to intensify their focus on serious offenses. In addition, long-needed police reforms that strengthen public trust and legitimacy remain key priorities, as collaborative relationships between police and communities are essential for solving crimes and sustaining durable reductions in violence.

Appendix: Cities and Offenses

City	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Atlanta	X				X			X	X	
Austin	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
Baltimore	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	
Boston		X			X			X	X	X
Buffalo	X				X			X	X	
Chandler	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	
Chicago	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Cincinnati		X	X	X				X	X	
Dallas			X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Denver	X				X	X	X	X	X	X
Detroit	X	X			X				X	X
Los Angeles	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	
Louisville	X	X			X			X	X	X
Memphis	X				X	X	X	X	X	X
Milwaukee	X		X	X	X				X	
Minneapolis					X	X	X	X	X	
Nashville	X	X	X	X				X	X	X
New York	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
Norfolk	X				X	X	X	X	X	X
Omaha	X	X			X			X	X	
Philadelphia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Phoenix	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
Pittsburgh	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Raleigh	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
Sacramento			X	X	X					X
San Francisco		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Seattle	X	X			X			X	X	X
St. Petersburg	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
Washington	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	
Total	23	19	12	12	26	16	16	25	26	19

Key

- 1 - Homicide
- 2 - Aggravated Assault
- 3 - Gun Assault
- 4 - Domestic Violence
- 5 - Robbery
- 6 - Residential Burglary
- 7 - Nonresidential Burglary
- 8 - Larceny
- 9 - Motor Vehicle Theft
- 10 - Drug Offense