

# JOSHUA CRAWFORD

## Director of Criminal Justice Initiatives



Joshua Crawford is a nationally recognized criminal justice expert whose work focuses on crime prevention, effective policing, and public safety policy. An engaging speaker and policy strategist, Joshua brings thoughtful analysis and actionable solutions to the biggest challenges facing America's criminal justice system. He also sheds light on the underreported but significant link between public safety and upward mobility—how reducing crime empowers communities to attract businesses, increase jobs, and boost economic opportunities for lower-income residents.

He is available for keynote presentations, panels, policy forums, and media appearances, where he draws on his experience as a prosecutor and policy leader to help audiences understand how smart policy decisions can reduce crime and improve communities.

## Key Messages

- ▶ Reducing crime is a foundational step to more prosperous communities where people can find good jobs and improve their lives.
- ▶ Policymakers can deter crime by holding violent offenders accountable, ensuring punishments fit the crime, focusing on the root causes of violence, reaching at-risk youth early, and supporting a well-funded, fair, and effective legal system.
- ▶ Failed public safety disproportionately hurts poor and disadvantaged communities.
- ▶ The rise in violent crime in America isn't inevitable—it's the result of bad policy. That makes it a policy choice. The solution lies with smarter policy decisions at the state and local level.

## Signature Topics

- Public Safety Policy
- Crime Prevention
- Gangs
- Juvenile Criminal Behavior
- Homicide Rates
- Policing Strategies
- Sentencing & Corrections
- Re-entry & Rehabilitation
- Recidivism Reduction
- Upward Mobility & Crime

## Book Joshua

Contact Camille Walsh to book Joshua for an interview or speaking engagement.

✉ [camillew@foropportunity.org](mailto:camillew@foropportunity.org)

# Biography

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Joshua Crawford is the Director of Criminal Justice Initiatives at the Georgia Center for Opportunity. A well-regarded expert on gang violence and criminal justice policy, Joshua has testified before local and state legislative committees as well as Federal agencies and a Presidential commission.

He is a former prosecutor who frequently authors studies on reducing violent crime, writes state legislation, and helps city governments implement policy changes to reduce crime and recidivism.

# Education

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Joshua has a B.S. in Crime, Law, and Justice from Penn State University (2012), a JD from Suffolk University Law School (2015), and a MA in Criminal Justice from John Jay College of Criminal Justice (2023).

# Media

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Joshua has written for national outlets including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Hill*, *Newsweek*, *National Review*, and the *Washington Examiner*.

He has also examined crime trends for specific cities in outlets including the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and more.

# Prior Experience

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- Young Voices Contributor (2022-2023)
- Executive Director, Pegasus Institute (2019-2022)
- Co-Founder and Director of Criminal Justice Policy, Pegasus Institute (2016-2019)
- Deputy District Attorney, Sacramento County District Attorney's Office (2015-2016)
- Fellow, Criminal Justice Legal Foundation (2015)
- Research Assistant, Massachusetts Bar Association (2013-2015)
- Clerk, Boston Municipal Court Judge Michael Coyne (2013)

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## **Covid Becomes an Excuse for Crime**

The focus on comparing 2019 and 2022 rates obscures how bad policy has worsened violence.

By Josh Crawford  
November 7, 2023

There's more to the FBI's newly released [Crime in the Nation Statistics](#) than headlines would have you believe. The story from many outlets is that violent crime is no longer an issue—it surged with the onset of the Covid pandemic in 2020 and has since declined.

Violent crime nationally fell 1.3% in 2022, putting the year's rate on a similar footing as 2019's. But a glance at the top-line FBI numbers indicates that more is going on. Murders decreased 6% compared with 2021, and aggravated assault decreased 1.5%. But carjackings rose more than 8%, and robberies increased 1.3%.

Part of the problem with most media analysis is that 2019 didn't represent a historical baseline of homicide and violent crime rates in America—2014 did. Nationally, violent crime and murder were much more prevalent in 2019 than in 2014. So though U.S. rates have fallen back to pre-pandemic levels, the country is well above normal violent-crime rates. Total violent crime in 2022 was 5% higher than in 2014, an increase that represents tens of thousands of additional victims in a single year. The national homicide rate in 2022 was 43% higher than in 2014. Since 2015, there have been roughly 30,000 more murders in the U.S. than there would have been if the homicide rate had stayed at the 2014 low.

None of this is easily attributable to Covid, nor are the vast local differences in violent crime and homicide rates that emerged in the past year and a half. Some cities have seen marked drops in crime. So far in 2023 homicides are down 17% in Atlanta, violent crime has [fallen 12%](#) in Dallas, and Miami's murder and violent crime rates have hit historic lows. Elsewhere, things aren't going nearly as well. In Washington, [violent crime is up](#) 40% in the first 10 months of 2023 compared with this time last year, and homicides are up 33%. Seattle [has already had](#) 10 more murders this year than in all of 2022. San Francisco's murder rate also is on track to surpass last year's.

Pre- and post-pandemic comparisons obscure it, but there's an obvious factor that explains the rate differences in these places and the overall national increase: public safety policy. Officials in Washington, Seattle and San Francisco all have permissive attitudes toward criminals and hostile ones toward police. The capital has been a leader in bad policy. Washington has twice significantly defunded the police in recent years, and in 2022

attempted to reduce penalties for carjackings even as auto-theft rates were skyrocketing. That change was so ill-advised that Congress overturned it this year.

By contrast, Atlanta, Dallas and Miami all treat crime as a serious problem. The Georgia government has led a [robust antigang effort](#), while Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens pledged to hire an additional 250 police officers by the end of 2023. Dallas has used targeted policing in crime hot spots; Miami has remained dedicated to law enforcement.

Poorly conceived policy also explains the post-2014 and post-2019 increases in violent crime. Many of these detrimental policies, which really caught on in 2020, took shape after the Ferguson, Mo., riots in 2015.

The media's focus on the pandemic shifts the blame from the self-styled progressive politicians who pushed these destructive policies. Voters can blame Covid rather than efforts to defund the police, reduce penalties for violent crimes, or legalize hard drugs. To understand what's driving crime, it's essential to take a broader view. Covid isn't why homicides are surging in progressive enclaves or declining in cities where law and order is being restored. The true culprits—and the best levers for change—are policy decisions at the state and local level.

*Mr. Crawford is director of criminal justice initiatives at the Georgia Center for Opportunity.*



## There's a crime divide between Americans and politicians, and voters are watching

By Josh Crawford  
June 15, 2024

With the announcement that [President Biden](#) and former President Trump will debate in Atlanta in June, the 2024 election cycle is in full swing. Many Americans are not enthused. Earlier this year, 67 percent of respondents told [a pollster](#) that they were “tired of seeing the same candidates in presidential elections and want someone new.” In fact, [30 percent of voters](#) think that neither Biden nor Trump “did more to help people like them,” 29 percent think [that neither](#) will be a good president and 26 percent of Americans have a [negative view](#) of both candidates.

And with just a [few races](#) likely to decide control of the U.S. Senate, what stands to sway Americans' votes? For many voters, the answer is simple but profound: They want to feel safer in their neighborhoods.

According to a [Harvard CAPS-Harris](#) poll conducted this May, crime and drugs ranked fourth out of the 30 issues Americans believe are most important right now behind only immigration, inflation and jobs. The issue seems particularly important to Republican primary voters. In the week leading up to Super Tuesday, crime was the top issue searched on Google across the 15 states with Republican primaries.

But it's not just Republicans who are concerned about crime. [A recent poll](#) in reliably blue Maryland found crime to be the issue voters were most concerned about — more than they were worried about “affordable housing, public education, taxes, jobs and the economy, roads and transit, climate change or ‘something else.’”

Maryland is home to one of the nation's most-watched Senate races as former Governor [Larry Hogan](#), a Republican and the most popular governor in the country for much of his tenure, attempts to flip an open Senate seat.

Crime, especially violent crime, saw its peak as an election issue in the mid-1990s, when voters demanded a more serious approach to the violence and chaos in America's urban cores. While rates of violent crime have not returned to their early 1990s peak, we have seen dramatic increases in violence, especially homicide, [since 2014](#).

While the most recent data suggest that the homicide explosion of the last few years has crested, data from the National Crime Victimization Survey show that other violent crime

continues to spike. According to [an analysis](#) of that data by former director of the Bureau of Justice Statistics Jeffrey Anderson, total violent crime up 58 percent in urban areas since 2019. If you remove simple assaults, more serious violent crimes are actually up 73 percent.

Voters are fed up. Even in progressive enclaves, they are rejecting elected officials who don't share their concerns. In crime-riddled Washington, D.C., recall efforts have been initiated against [two District Council members](#). In deep-blue Portland, Ore., voters recently ousted one of the nation's most progressive and permissive prosecutors in favor of a more traditional law-and-order challenger. Voters had previously done likewise in [San Francisco](#). Voters instinctively know what policymakers would do well to remember: Rising crime is a policy decision, not a circumstance. People are demanding better because policy can produce better.

At the height of public scrutiny over urban crime and disorder in the 1990s, policymakers responded and drove down serious violence, both making cities safer and [improving upward mobility](#), making families and communities more prosperous as a result.

So for those seeking office this November, whether they're at the top of the ticket or the very bottom, they need to ensure they're not only sharing voters' concerns about crime, but that they do what voters want once in office. Fund the police. Hold violent offenders accountable. Ensure a fair, just system that doesn't let fear and lawlessness reign.

*Joshua Crawford is the director of Criminal Justice Initiatives at the Georgia Center for Opportunity and a policy leader with Public Safety Solutions for America.*

# The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

## A path that could reduce Atlanta's juvenile crime

By Josh Crawford  
June 6, 2023

In January, Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens [launched](#) the “Year of the Youth” plan to combat juvenile crime rates in the city. The issue is a pressing one. Consider that in 2022, 19 of the 170 homicide victims in Atlanta were children. Deshon DuBose, a 13-year-old, is among the juvenile homicide victims already in 2023. He was gunned down while leaving Cascade Family Skating in January.

Meanwhile, Georgia Juvenile Justice Commissioner Tyrone Oliver [says](#) that around 50% of youth incarcerated in the state self-identify as gang members. Jayden Myrick, who was found guilty of murder in a 2018 robbery and fatal shooting at an Atlanta wedding, [admitted](#) under oath that he was recruited into gang life when he was just 9 or 10 years old.

Juvenile violence [skyrocketed](#) across the country in 2020, reversing decades of decline. But even before the increases, juvenile crime was reported in 2018 as [15 times higher](#) in Fulton County than the national average.

Juvenile offending, like adult criminality, concentrates among a [very small number of offenders](#). These juveniles are typically either associated with or being recruited into street gangs and often [pressured by adults](#) to commit serious violent offenses.

Thankfully, there are well-documented ways to reduce that kind of offending. Look to Louisville, Kentucky for a recent example of solutions.

In recent years, Louisville has experienced substantial increases in juvenile violence, with arrest rates for juvenile homicide suspects 50% higher than the national average and a [majority of carjacking](#) arrestees being under 18 in 2020 and 2021. This prompted Republican State Representative Kevin Bratcher to begin working on what would become [House Bill 3](#), a comprehensive violent juvenile offender accountability and treatment bill. While some of House Bill 3 dealt with issues specific to Louisville, many of its provisions offer policies and best practices worth adopting in Georgia.

Most importantly, the bill required that any juvenile charged with a serious violent offense such as murder, rape, robbery, burglary in the first degree and so on, be immediately detained for a period not to exceed 48 hours. This mandatory detention serves two

purposes. It not only [protects the public](#) and the juvenile by disrupting the cycle of violence but it also ensures meaningful time for mental health and drug abuse evaluations and comprehensive evaluations of the risks posed by the juvenile before a judge ultimately determines long-term release conditions or pretrial detention.

They also funded a new detention center in Louisville and a myriad of treatment programs intended to get juveniles with one foot in the streets and one foot in civil society back on the right track. This includes funding cognitive behavioral therapy which is being used to [effectively](#) get serious juvenile offenders back on a positive life course. Why fund programs in facilities and not just in the community? Treatment programs for high-risk juveniles are most effective [after](#) 200 hours of treatment.

Finally, the new law creates early intervention points for young people who showed no improvement in their diversion programs. It does so by allowing an interdisciplinary team to alter the treatment methods earlier. If parents are unwilling or refuse to comply with a child's diversion plan, a judge has the authority to hold the parents accountable. Chronic, unexcused absences from schools [are strong predictors](#) of future juvenile delinquency. Unresolved truancy is [strongly predictive](#) of future juvenile delinquency and even adult criminality. So, getting it right with those kids today can help a child escape being preyed on by adult gang members and prevent serious violence in the future.

We didn't get here overnight, and the reasons for the spike in juvenile crime in Atlanta are multifaceted. But the bottom line is that policy solutions similar to those enacted this year in Kentucky can help the city move forward and create a safer community and a more just and fair system.

*Josh Crawford is the director of criminal justice initiatives at the Georgia Center for Opportunity.*

# CHICAGO SUN★TIMES

## **We must rein in violent crime to help those who need economic opportunity**

Businesses are moving out of cities and neighborhoods with rising crime rates. By abandoning these high-risk locations, these businesses take with them any job opportunities they provide to poorer residents.

By Josh Crawford

October 8, 2022

Americans are more worried about crime than they have been in decades. A [recent poll](#) found that 8 in every 10 Americans say they worry about crime either “a great deal” (53%) or “a fair amount” (27%).

This fear is driving businesses large and small out of cities and neighborhoods with rising crime rates. By abandoning these high-risk locations, these businesses take with them any job opportunities they provide to poorer residents.

Local and state governments must focus on reducing violent crime, not just as necessary to protect human life but also because doing so is a prerequisite to real economic opportunity in poor communities.

Increased concern about crime has followed a sharp increase in violent crime, especially homicides over the last six years. In 2021, 12 [major cities](#) saw their deadliest year on record. Chicago had its deadliest year [in a quarter century](#).

In recent comments to the Economic Club of Chicago, McDonald’s President and CEO Chris Kempczinski noted that out-of-control violent crime, homelessness and drug overdoses in Chicago were negatively impacting both McDonalds’ restaurant locations and corporate recruitment to the city. He’s committed to staying in Chicago, but other companies across the country are already closing down retail locations in areas experiencing surges in crime.

Starbucks [announced](#) it would close 16 locations in Portland, Seattle, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., over safety concerns. Walgreens [is closing](#) five stores in San Francisco due to rampant crime. Small businesses from [Seattle](#) to [Minnesota](#) are citing crime as the reason they’re closing their doors.

While large businesses may not be the most sympathetic victims of the nation’s dramatic increase in violent crime, the people this crime hurts the most continue to be those from the most socially isolated and economically disadvantaged communities.

Studies have repeatedly found that increases in violent crime reduce economic mobility and hamper private sector job growth. [One study](#) found that changes in the rates of violent crime substantially impacted the economic mobility of children raised in low-income families. As crime went up during childhood and adolescence, their level of economic mobility went down.

Another [study](#) found that increases in violent crime cause existing businesses to downsize and discourage new businesses from entering the marketplace. No amount of economic incentives the government can provide will entice businesses to open in dangerous areas with low-recruitment potential. As a result, increasing crime will reduce the economic opportunities for lower-income residents.

Thankfully, while the problem of violent crime is large, it is not insurmountable. But reversing these trends will require understanding how we got here and what works to reduce crime.

Don't expect crime to abate with the pandemic. Those who yearn for "pre-pandemic" crime rates ignore that in many cities, these increases began in 2015 when American cities had a [more than 10% increase](#) in murder over 2014, and 2016 saw another 8% increase on top of that. Gangs continued to operate [unabated](#) during government-ordered lockdowns, and given the retaliatory nature of so much street violence, increased violent crime often begets increased violent crime.

Next, crime, especially serious and violent crime, is concentrated among a very small number of gang members in any given city. Typically, about [0.6% of a city's population](#) is involved with these kinds of groups, while they're responsible for 50% of a city's homicides. It also tends to concentrate around certain areas; about 3% to 5% of specific addresses are responsible for about [50% of a city's crime](#).

This means a city — even one plagued by gang violence like Chicago — can substantially reduce crime by focusing law enforcement, corrections and social service resources on a relatively small number of people. Strategies that do so have substantially [reduced homicides](#) from Boston, Massachusetts, to Stockton, California.

Failure to do so will only make our poorest neighborhoods poorer. Large and wealthy corporations like [Citadel](#) can leave for greener and safer pastures with relative ease. But failure of local and state officials to rein in violent crime will leave those with no means to leave with fewer opportunities to improve their lives.

*Joshua Crawford is the director of the Criminal Justice Initiative at the Georgia Center for Opportunity.*

# ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

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## Crime bill increased police, sentences and public safety

By Josh Crawford  
September 27, 2024

The United States experienced dramatic surges in crime by the early 1990s. The violent crime rate was up [470%](#) from 1961, and the murder rate had increase 92% from that year.

Life in American cities was more dangerous, and punishment was not fitting the crimes. While the median sentence for murder was 15 years, the median time served was only 5.5 years, according to the [University of Dayton Law Review](#). The median sentence for rape was five years, but the median time served was a paltry three. Overall, violent criminals served, on average, 37% (2 years, 11 months) of their sentence. And 44% of Americans said they lived near and area where they would be afraid to walk alone at night, according to [Gallup](#).

In response to widespread pressure from law enforcement and residents, President Bill Clinton on Sept. 13, 1994, signed the bipartisan Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. The bill injected billions into hiring police, created a grant program to encourage state adoption of "truth in sentencing" laws, added prison capacity and criminalized gang membership.

[Support](#) for the bill was considerably higher among Black Americans (58%) than among white Americans (49%) — likely because Black Americans bore the brunt of violent crime victimization and homicide then and now.

After passage, violent crime and homicide rates ticked downward for the next two decades. The results were particularly acute for Black violent crime victims. From 1993 to 2005, the rate of Black non-fatal violent victimization dropped by more than [50%](#). While it would be foolish to attribute all of this to the 1994 Crime Bill alone, the legislation's policies were influential.

Economist Steven Levitt completed the most comprehensive [analysis](#) of the crime decline that began in the mid-1990s and found four significant factors of impact. Two of them — the increased number of police on the streets and larger prison populations — can be directly tied to the 1994 Crime Bill.

[Evaluations](#) of the bill's hiring program found that it increased the number of officers and reduced crime. These results align with public safety research that has demonstrated more police means less crime. Analyses of police staffing levels and crime in [Florida](#) and [New York City](#) found increasing police levels reduced overall crime. Another [study](#) found each additional police officer prevents 0.1 homicides — an effect that's twice as large for Black victims compared to white victims.

Harsher punishments and more incarceration likely contributed to the decline because incarceration has a significant incapacitation benefit. While in prison, criminal offenders cannot victimize the public. A [review](#) by the Sacramento-based Criminal Justice Legal Foundation found that any claims of prison causing criminal behavior cannot outweigh that incapacitation benefit. One [analysis](#) found that incapacitating one high-rate offender prevents, on average, 9.4 serious felonies. [Two studies](#) from the U.S. Sentencing Commission found that longer sentences reduced recidivism among released federal inmates.

The main criticism of these provisions is that they exacerbated “mass incarceration” — a genuinely meaningless term that sounds scary but conveys no information. While it is true that U.S. incarceration rates are higher than Western Europe's, we are not substantially [more punitive](#). What we do have is a much higher rate of gun crime, which necessitates longer prison sentences and more incarceration.

This isn't to say the bill was perfect, and in the 30 years since it became law, we have found ways to be more targeted in policing and sentencing. Overall, though, the 1994 Crime Bill marked a significant policy accomplishment and helped usher in a 20-year decline in violent crime that yielded fewer victims in neighborhoods previously held captive by violence.

## Why Kids Join Gangs—and How to Stop Them

Fewer young people feel the need to join when neighborhoods are safe.

By Josh Crawford

March 21, 2025

In Philadelphia last month, law enforcement [announced](#) the indictment of 12 teenagers for a series of violent crimes spanning two years. Calling themselves “The Senders,” the groups were charged with murder, 26 shootings, and multiple carjackings. One of the alleged shooters, now 19, is charged with nine shootings totaling 16 victims. Another was just 14 at the time of his alleged crime—a stark reminder of how gangs can entrench even the youngest members.

These alleged offenders’ ages may be shocking, but young people make up a much larger share of gangs than many realize. [Survey data](#) from the 1990s found that around 5 percent of young people were in gangs; the average age of joining a gang was 13. Gang-affiliated youth are far [likelier](#) to engage in serious crime than other at-risk youth or children with delinquent but non-gang-affiliated friends.

Governments have launched a wide array of prevention and intervention efforts to steer kids away from gang life. These programs try to dissuade youth from joining gangs or encourage them to leave. But the initiatives have had mixed results, and the ones that [do work well](#) often have limited access to at-risk kids.

To address the root problem, policymakers must understand [why kids](#) join gangs. Specifically, they need to recognize that the biggest driver of gang membership is violent crime. Consequently, the best way to stop teenagers from joining gangs is to provide them with safer neighborhoods.

The three most common reasons former gang members cite for joining—financial gain, personal protection, and a sense of belonging—are closely tied to growing up in high-crime communities. As violent crime [increases](#), new businesses are [discouraged](#) from opening, and existing ones hesitate to expand, limiting economic opportunities for young people. High-crime environments also weaken social bonds and heighten kids’ sense of vulnerability, making gang affiliation seem like a form of security. Additionally, residents in such neighborhoods often experience social isolation. A [study](#) of adults in Chicago found that those in high-crime areas had significantly fewer interactions with friends and perceived less social support.

All this suggests that the path to safer neighborhoods doesn't start with keeping kids out of gangs but with creating safer neighborhoods. When communities offer lower crime, stronger social ties, and resulting economic opportunity, fewer young people feel the need to join gangs.

Policymakers and communities have several tools at their disposal to achieve this. Law enforcement can focus on suppressing gang activity, deterring further crime, and improving public safety by cleaning up high-crime neighborhoods and dedicating more resources to solving homicides and other serious cases. They can employ policing strategies like "[focused deterrence](#)" that have [meaningfully](#) reduced gang violence in cities across the country, and encourage prosecutors to use sentencing tools like "gang enhancements," which ensure that the most dangerous criminals spend [significant time](#) in prison.

With such approaches, gang life becomes less appealing, and fewer young people feel compelled to join. This is a more effective strategy than simply urging youth to stay out of gangs while their neighborhoods remain crime-ridden and economic opportunities scarce. Safe neighborhoods don't happen by chance; they are the product of deliberate policy choices. For the sake of those residing in high-crime areas and the many Americans still living in fear, policymakers should prioritize public safety by curbing gang activity and restoring order to communities.

[Joshua Crawford](#) is the director of Criminal Justice Initiatives at the Georgia Center for Opportunity and the author of "Kids and Community Violence: Costs, Consequences, and Solutions" in the newly edited volume [Doing Right by Kids](#).