



## POVERTY AND PROGRESS IN NEW YORK VI

### Crime Trends in Public Housing, 2006–15

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#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Manhattan Institute’s “Poverty and Progress in New York” series tracks quality of life data and issues in New York City in order to benchmark the effect of Mayor de Blasio’s policies on lower-income New Yorkers. The Mayor has pledged to “take dead aim at the Tale of Two Cities ... [and] put an end to economic and social inequalities that threaten to unravel the city we love.”<sup>1</sup> This paper, the sixth installment, continues the examination of crime trends in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments, the city’s 334 public-housing properties.

In particular, we focus on the 15 properties targeted by the Mayor’s Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety (APNS). The initiative was announced in the hope of reversing the unfavorable long-term crime trend in NYCHA relative to the rest of the city. As crime in the rest of NYC fell sharply during 2006–15, crime in NYCHA developments has—after an initial drop during 2006–09—subsequently returned to 2006 levels: relative to the rest of the city, New York’s public-housing properties are thus far more dangerous now than they were a decade ago.<sup>2</sup>

This paper finds that the APNS has been a modest success in the year-to-date crime data through November 1st 2015.<sup>3</sup> The following 15 individual developments were targeted: Boulevard, Brownsville, Bushwick, Butler, Castle Hill, Ingersoll, Patterson, Polo

Grounds, Queensbridge, Red Hook, St. Nicholas, Stapleton, Tompkins, Van Dyke, and Wagner. In particular:

- Murders declined 25% and shootings declined 13% in the 15 APNS developments, but both are up slightly in the rest of NYCHA.
- Major crimes overall are up 2% in the 319 NYCHA developments that did not receive new policing resources, but down 8% in the 15 targeted APNS developments.
- The APNS initiative does not appear to have been successful to date in reducing car theft, robbery, or burglary relative to the rest of NYCHA.
- The APNS properties' share of NYCHA's major crime has fallen from 20% at plan launch to 16% today, but NYCHA as a whole still suffers from a disproportionate amount of violent crime--including the APNS projects.

## NYCHA CRIME BACKGROUND

As our Progress and Poverty V report explained, NYCHA has seen a rise in violent crime: not only relative to its share of city population, but relative to its recent past since 2009. Disproportionately high violent crime against the residents of NYCHA is a long-term problem predating Mayor de Blasio's tenure, but it is a problem for which he has taken both rhetorical and moral responsibility moving forward. **Figure 1**, taken from our previous report, displays the unfortunate trend in the number of major crimes in NYCHA since 2006.

**Figure 2**, also taken from our previous report, shows how NYCHA's violent crime rate is far higher than its proportion of the city's population. Indeed, even as NYCHA has shrunk slightly as a share of the city, the murder gap has grown since 2006. This is the unacceptably high base from which crime-prevention policy in NYCHA must progress.

## FINDINGS

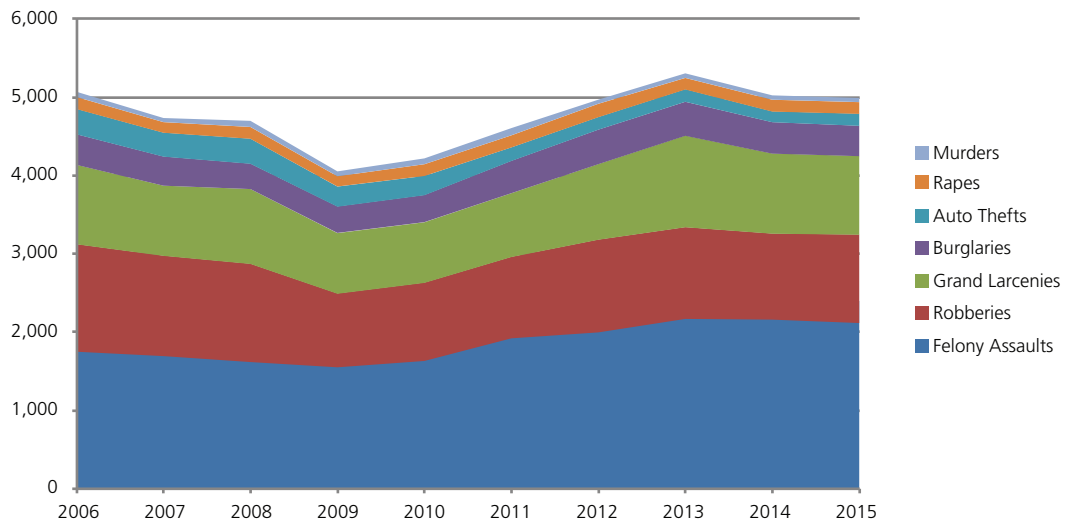
Commissioner Bratton, Mayor de Blasio, and Governor Cuomo are aware of NYCHA's disproportionate share of overall violent crime highlighted in our previous report. The Mayor announced an Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety in midsummer 2014, specifically a \$210.5 million investment consisting of: "\$122 million of City funds to relieve NYCHA of other obligations, so that money can be used for repairs and maintenance; \$50 million for physical improvements to enhance security; \$1.5 million for exterior lighting at the 15 developments; \$21.4 million for the civilianization of 200 police officers; and \$15.6 million to expand key programs to help build stronger individuals, families and communities."

This initiative, targeted at violent crime against citizens in some of New York's poorest neighborhoods, has begun to bear modest fruit. Though NYCHA's disproportionate suffering from major crime has continued to grow in the 319 properties outside the targeted Neighborhood Safety areas, crime has begun to decline modestly within the 15 treated areas (**Figure 3, Total Index**). This is a promising development, the details of which should be evaluated with care by the NYPD.

In a realistically rigorous policy experiment, the NYPD would match statistically similar project areas, and then randomly assign policing treatments to half of the matched sets to create a treatment and control group. In order to differentiate which combined tactics are most effective, the NYPD could create multiple treatment groups that mix and match the potential treatments—new street lighting alone; additional beat cops with street lighting; security cameras with street lighting; increased community center hours with street lighting; and whatever other tactics the NYPD brass thinks it should test based on experience.

However, likely due to practical and political concerns, the city did not create mixed treatment groups necessary to differentially identify the most effective

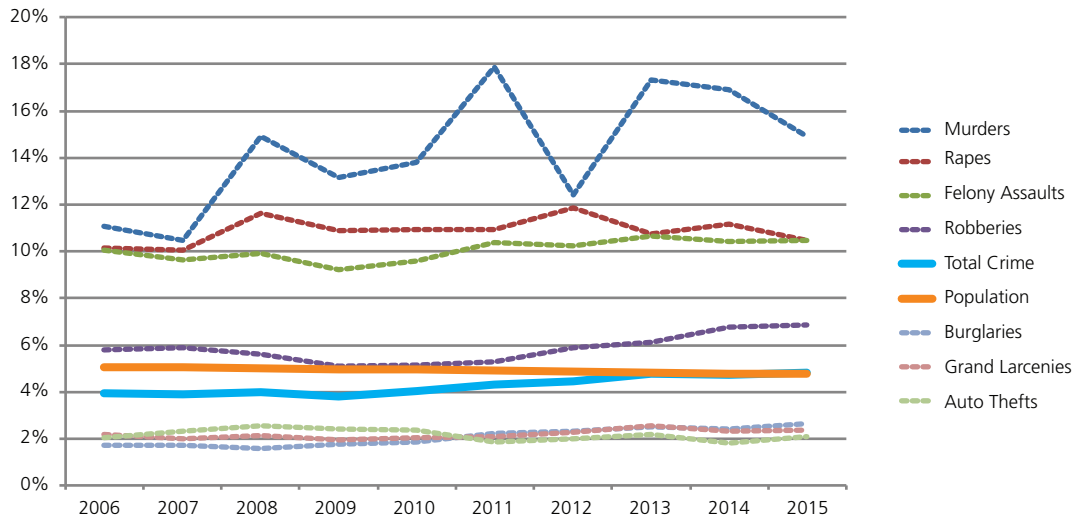
Figure 1. Crime in NYCHA Developments, 2006–15\*



\*2014 and 2015 data cover January–September.

Source: for 2006–13, see <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nyc-crime/nycha-residents-live-fear-major-crimes-public-housing-soar-article-1.1747195>; for 2014–15, see NYPD Housing Bureau Crime Analysis: Detailed Crime Comparison, Compstat Period Ending October 11

Figure 2. NYCHA Developments: Share of NYC Crime and Share of NYC Population, 2006–15\*



\*2014 and 2015 data cover January–September.

Source: for 2006–13, see <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nyc-crime/nycha-residents-live-fear-major-crimes-public-housing-soar-article-1.1747195>; for 2014–15, see NYPD Housing Bureau Crime Analysis: Detailed Crime Comparison, Compstat Period Ending October 11

Figure 3. Year-to-Date Relative Progress of the APNS Properties vs. Rest of NYCHA

YTD November 1st		APNS "Treatment"	Rest of NYCHA "Control"
Murder	2015	6	37
	2014	8	36
	CH %	-25%	3%
Rape	2015	22	104
	2014	24	103
	CH %	-8%	1%
Robbery	2015	151	791
	2014	145	761
	CH %	4%	4%
Fel. Assault	2015	301	1487
	2014	349	1445
	CH %	-14%	3%
Burglary	2015	51	274
	2014	52	296
	CH %	-2%	-7%
Gr. Larceny	2015	122	732
	2014	140	727
	CH %	-13%	1%
GLA	2015	22	105
	2014	14	103
	CH %	57%	2%
Shooting Inc.	2015	28	168
	2014	32	160
	CH %	-13%	5%
Total Index	2015	675	3530
	2014	732	3471
	CH %	-8%	2%

treatment combinations. As a second-best method, we use the NYPD's year-to-date 2014 and 2015 panel data at the project level through November 1st to get a preliminary look at the intervention as a whole. The APNS properties serve as the "treatment pool", and the rest of NYCHA serves as the "control pool" in a quasi-natural experiment setup.

In the APNS "Treatment" pool, the highlighting corresponds to relative progress. Major crimes are

highlighted in green when they declined more (rose less) than the rest of NYCHA "Control" pool, and highlighted in red when the major crime percentages declined less (rose more) than the "Control" pool. In the "Control" pool, highlighting reflects absolute progress: increases in red, decreases in green.

It is worth noting that the APNS initiative brought 200 net new cops to the NYPD's Housing Authority division through the civilianization of desk jobs, thus

freeing up trained officers for active police work. But 500 officers were allocated from elsewhere for the initiative. We cannot rule out the possibility that a diversion of resources could have contributed to this crime trend: The NYPD could be facing a game of “Whack-a-Mole” with criminals. Some criminal activity may have simply been shifted from heavily-policed “Treatment” properties into the “Control” properties.

## CONCLUSION

Two years into his term, the Mayor has gradually begun to address part of the public safety aspect of his “Tale of Two Cities” pledge—at least in the 15 APNS properties of NYCHA. Though the APNS didn’t provide the sort of rigorous experimental structure necessary to differentially identify the most effective treatments, we do at least have a quasi-natural experiment by which to evaluate the APNS treatment as a whole. The preliminary results are modest, but promising. The treatment group still suffers higher crime than the rest of the city, but the 10% net treatment effect on total major crime is quite promising, as are the declines in murders and shootings.

If anything, these data show how desperately NYCHA needs further policy change. 15 properties have received the treatment and benefitted—but in the meantime the 319 other properties have seen crime increase from a base that was already unacceptably high. NYCHA still suffers from a disproportionate amount of murders and other violent crimes, as shown in **Figure 2**. Our most vulnerable citizens deserve broader interventions against the violent crime of which they are disproportionately the victims, along with the public data and rigorous treatment frameworks necessary to prove what works.

The city should carefully evaluate the next phase of crime interventions in NYCHA: indeed, Governor Cuomo’s October 23rd announcement of \$42 million to pay for “security cameras, interior and exterior lighting and gunfire detection technology, among other enhancements”<sup>4</sup> provides a fresh opportunity for rigorous evaluation. We hope to see these resources employed in a testable manner that points the way towards future policy scale-up and evaluation.

## ENDNOTES

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1. <http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/susan-jones/mayor-diblasio-promises-tackle-nycs-inequality-crisis>
2. Progress and Poverty V, Figure 2 and Figure 3
3. NYPD Housing Authority Eagle Report, YTD figures through November 1st
4. Office of the Governor, Press Release: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-commits-42-million-fight-violent-crime-nycha-developments>



