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## Violent Crime in the City of Good Neighbors

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## Violent Crime in the City of Good Neighbors

### Abstract

A look at violent crime rates over the past twenty years shows that the ebb and flow of crime in Buffalo has reflected trends in many other cities: up in the early '90s, down during the mid and late '90s and rising gradually since 2000. Similarly, the city's shrinking police force is mirrored elsewhere as cities struggle with limited resources—resources that are hard to direct given uncertainty about the causes of crime.

### Keywords

Buffalo, Criminal Justice, Crime, Policy Brief, Other, PDF

What's been happening  
statewide?

Are there  
enough cops?

How does Buffalo  
compare?

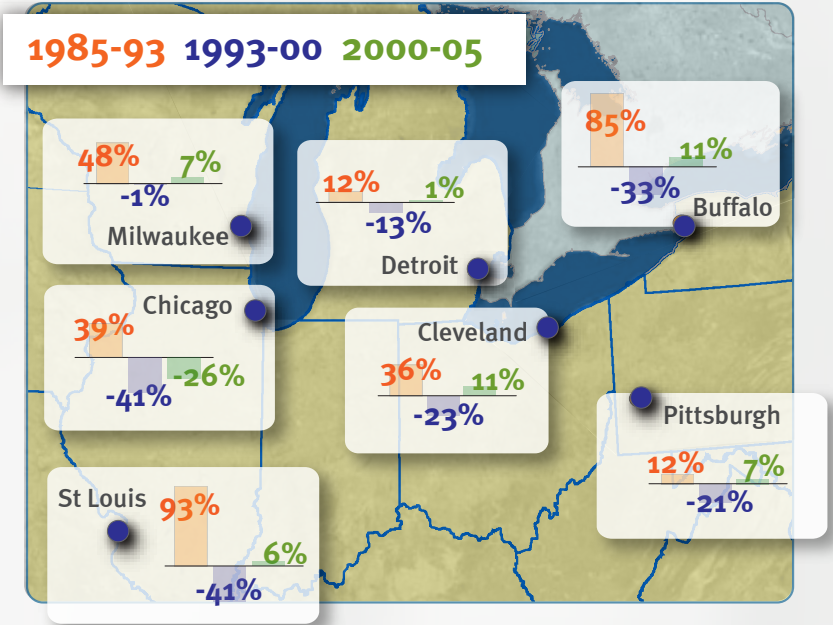
# Violent Crime in the City of Good Neighbors

A look at violent crime rates over the past twenty years shows that the ebb and flow of crime in Buffalo has reflected trends in many other cities: up in the early '90s, down during the mid and late '90s and rising gradually since 2000. Similarly, the city's shrinking police force is mirrored elsewhere as cities struggle with limited resources—resources that are hard to direct given uncertainty about the causes of crime.

## How does Buffalo compare?

Compared to major cities in the Midwest, Buffalo has largely mirrored violent crime trends over the past two decades, though often to extremes. After experiencing a larger increase in its violent crime rate than most cities between 1985 and 1993 (up 85%), Buffalo's rate dropped 33% between 1993 and 2000. During the same periods, national rates rose 34% and fell 32%, respectively. Although the national decline in violent crime has largely continued—though not as steeply—since 2000, crime rates in many mid-sized cities like Buffalo have risen. Very large cities like Chicago and New York have been notable exceptions to this rise.

Change in Violent Crime Over Select Periods, 1985-2005



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

# What's been happening statewide?

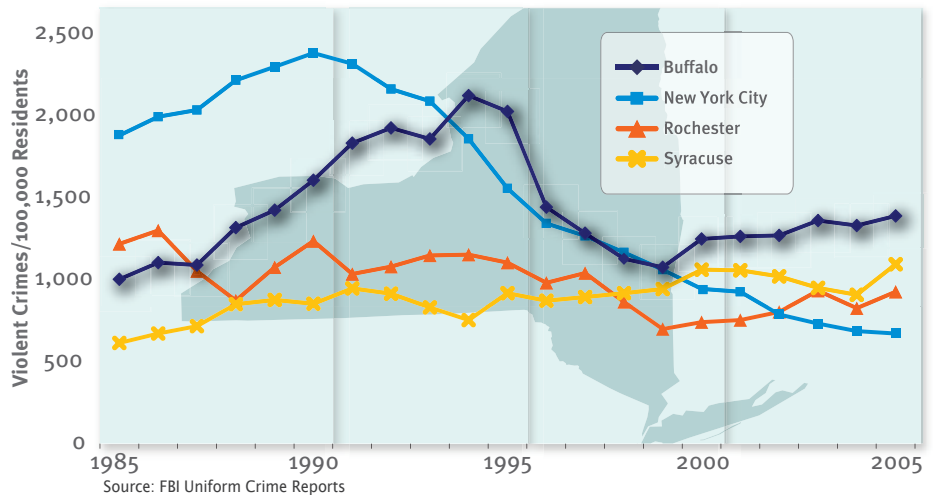
The significant and sustained decline in New York City's violent crime rate since the early 1990s has been remarkable, especially when compared to major upstate cities. In 1990, New York City was a more violent place than Buffalo, Rochester, or Syracuse, a condition that reversed itself by 2005. Buffalo, which had half the

violent crime rate of New York City in 1985, had a rate double that of New York by 2005. Though temporary, Buffalo's sharp increase in violent crime during the late 1980s and early 1990s was unique among its upstate neighbors.

Due to its size, New York City's plummeting crime rate has propelled a decline in

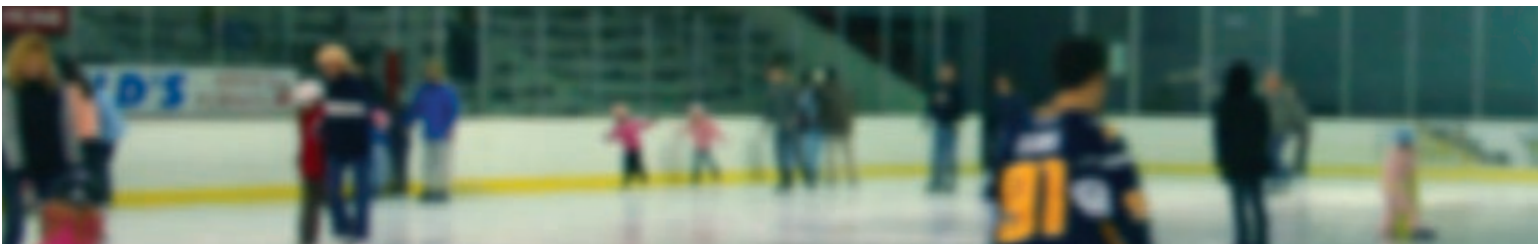
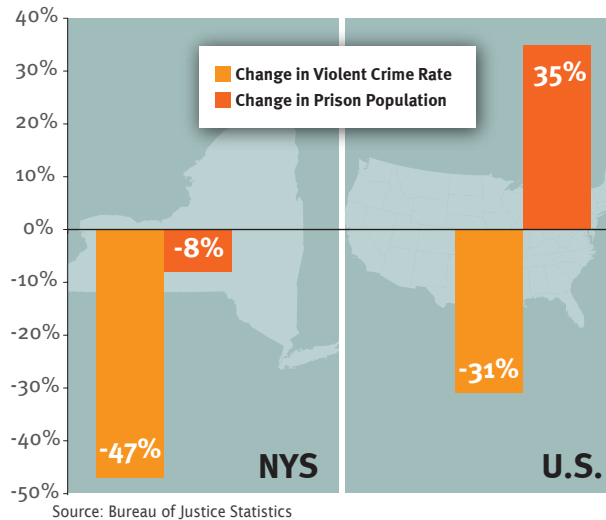
the statewide violent crime rate, which fell 47% between 1995 and 2005. That decline occurred alongside an 8% drop in the state's prison population during the period, bucking the nationwide trend of rapid growth in prison populations and sparking discussions of potential prison closings.

**Violent Crime Rates in New York, 1985-2005**



IN 1990, NEW YORK CITY WAS A MORE VIOLENT PLACE THAN UPSTATE CITIES - A CONDITION THAT REVERSED ITSELF BY 2005.

**Change in Violent Crime Rate and Prison Population, 1995-2005**



# Are there enough cops?

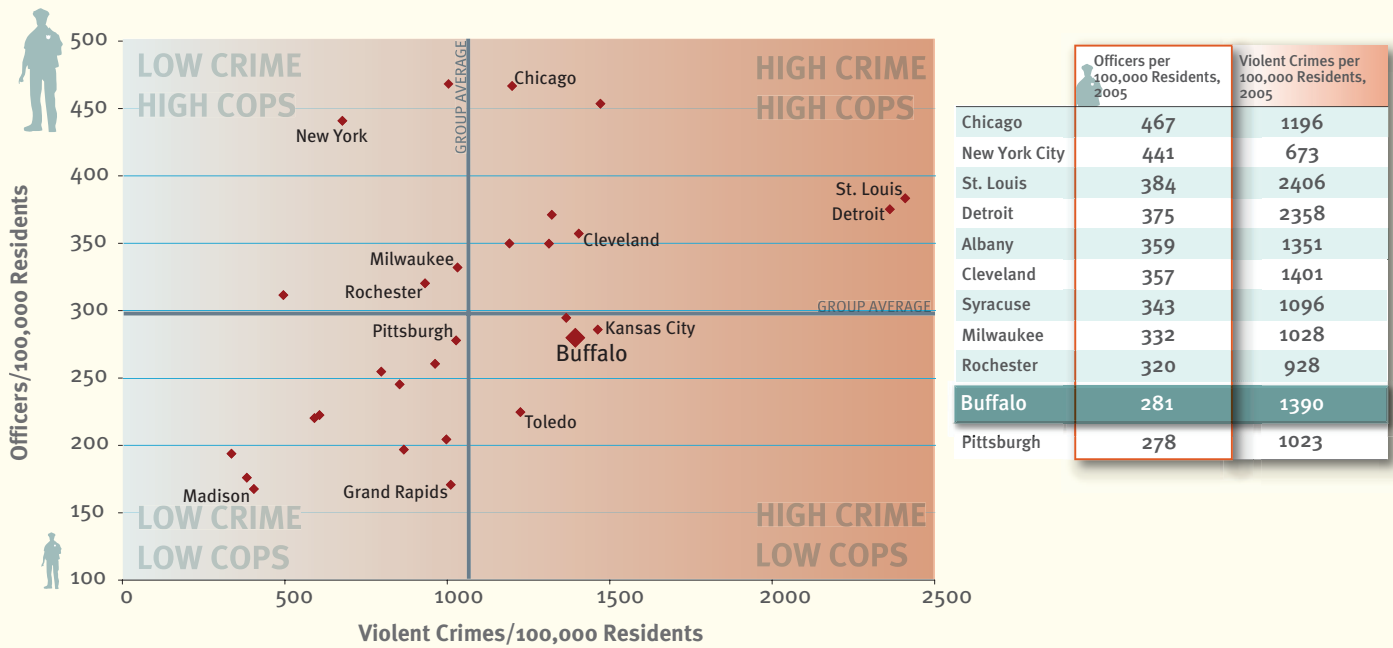
Adjusting for population differences, Buffalo has relatively fewer police officers than many other cities in New York and nearby states—especially for its violent crime levels. With 281 sworn officers per 100,000 residents in 2005, Buffalo had an officer rate well below similar cities. In a comparison of violent crime and officer levels in cities with

150,000 or more residents in the Northeast and Midwest, Buffalo was one of only a few cities to have both higher violent crime and fewer police officers than the group average.

The 12.7% decline in the size of the city's police force between 2000 and 2005, however, was something

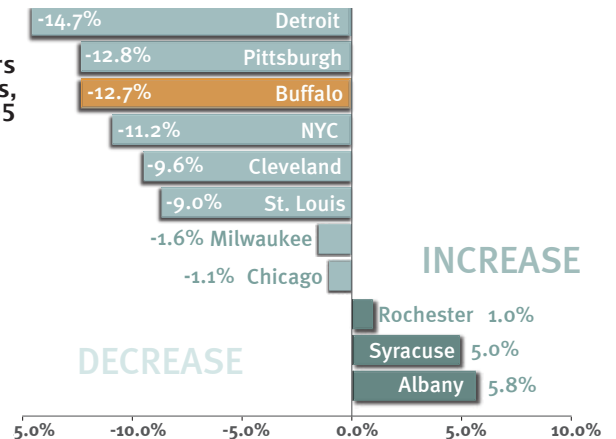
Buffalo shared with many cities, including Detroit, Pittsburgh and Cleveland. Down the Thruway, officer rates in Rochester, Syracuse and Albany all increased during the period, standing in contrast to Buffalo and New York City.

**Violent Crime and Police Officer Levels in 2005**



**BUFFALO HAS FEWER POLICE OFFICERS THAN MANY MAJOR CITIES IN NEW YORK AND NEARBY STATES.**

**Change in Officers per 100,000 Residents, 2000-2005**



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports and Census Bureau





# POLICY IMPACTS

## THE CAUSES

Theories abound on what produced the national drop in violent and other crimes during the 1990s. Explanations include fluctuations in the young adult population, improved law enforcement tactics, shrinking demand for crack cocaine, lower unemployment, prison expansions, and a variety of domestic violence and gun policies. No single theory appears to explain the drop entirely, underscoring the complexity of the issue and the difficulties inherent to tackling it.

## THE RESPONSE

With experts uncertain about the culprits of rising or falling crime rates, municipalities appropriately pursue a variety of strategies to prevent and prosecute crime. In his 2007 State of the City address, Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown offered a portfolio of tactics, including a Mobile Response Unit to target drugs, guns and gangs, an expanded system of surveillance cameras, a gun buyback program, and a 'Safe Streets, Secure Neighborhoods' initiative to prevent juvenile crime and bolster the presence of police citywide. As in other policy areas, a multi-faceted approach can improve the likelihood of success while making it more difficult to pinpoint and sustain the most effective strategies.

Nationally, urban law enforcement officials agree that crime is too complex and too important an issue for cities alone to deal with and that state and federal resources should be committed to reinforce local law enforcement and encourage innovative strategies. In New York, Governor Eliot Spitzer has announced his intent to create an 'Upstate Crime Initiative' to increase state assistance to local crime fighting efforts. At the federal level, urban crime has faced greater competition for attention from other priorities in recent years—especially homeland security.

## For More Information

FBI Uniform Crime Reports, online at <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm>

NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services, online at <http://criminaljustice.state.ny.us/>

*Prisoners in 2005*, a Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, online at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/p05.htm>

*A Gathering Storm: Violent Crime in America (2006)*, a report by the Police Executive Research Forum, available online at <http://www.policeforum.org/news.asp>

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