



POVERTY AND PROGRESS IN NEW YORK V Crime Trends in Public Housing, 2006–15

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New York City mayor Bill de Blasio assumed office in January 2014, promising 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.”¹ With respect to public safety, this promise translated into a determination to continue the low crime rates of recent years through a modified version of the Giuliani and Bloomberg approaches to policing.

The Manhattan Institute’s “Poverty and Progress in New York” series tracks the effects of Mayor de Blasio’s policies on lower-income New Yorkers. This paper, the fifth installment, examines crime trends in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments, the city’s 334 public-housing projects, during the last decade.

It finds that, as crime in the rest of NYC fell sharply during 2006–15,² crime in NYCHA developments has—after an initial drop during 2006–09—since returned to 2006 levels: relative to the rest of the city, New York’s public-housing projects are thus far more dangerous now than they were a decade ago. Other key findings include:

- Under Mayor de Blasio, crime in NYCHA developments—absolutely and as a share of the city total—has remained largely unchanged.
- Violent crime continues to disproportionately strike NYCHA developments: in 2015, they housed less than 5 percent of New York’s population³ but saw more than 10 percent of the city’s assaults and rapes, as well as 15 percent of its murders.

I. FINDINGS

In his second year in office, Mayor de Blasio has continued to emphasize his “tale of two cities” narrative,⁴ while pledging to improve the quality of life of NYC’s poorest residents—many of whom live in public housing,⁵ which continue to be plagued by disproportionately high levels of violent crime.

As crime plunged in the rest of NYC over the past decade (**Figure 1**), crime in NYCHA developments—after falling sharply during 2006–09—has soared up to 2006 levels (**Figure 2**). Relative to the rest of the city, New York’s public-housing projects are now far more dangerous than they were a decade ago (**Figure 3**).

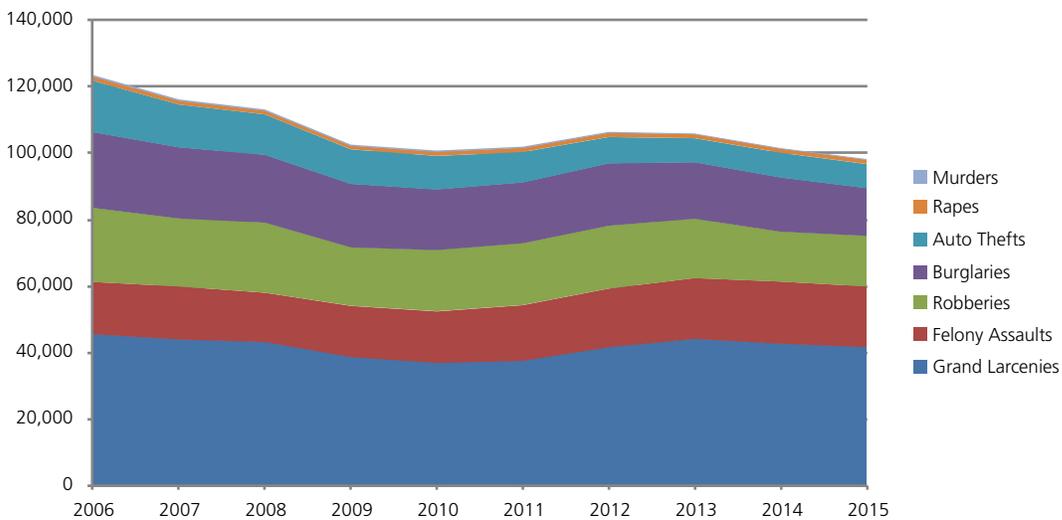
As Figure 3 shows, during 2006–15, NYCHA developments—home to about 5 percent of New York’s population—experienced a disproportionate and rising share of the city’s violent crime. In 2006, 10 percent of New York’s rapes and felony assaults, as well as about 11 percent of its murders, were committed on NYCHA developments. In 2015, slightly

more than 10 percent of New York’s rapes and felony assaults, as well as 15 percent of its murders (**Figure 4**), were committed on NYCHA developments. In absolute terms, however, the murder count in NYCHA developments fell from 66 in 2006 to (a projected) 41 in 2015.

As Figure 3 and Figure 4 show, NYCHA developments’ share of city population declined modestly during 2006–15 (from about 5.1 percent to 4.8 percent), but their share of total crime rose significantly (from about 4 percent to 5 percent). Indeed, during this period, crime in NYCHA developments, as a share of the city total, rose either modestly (rape, felony assault, grand larceny) or dramatically (murder, robbery, burglary).

Since January 2014, when Mayor de Blasio entered office, NYCHA developments’ share of citywide crimes has remained essentially unchanged: burglary and auto theft, for instance, are up slightly while murder and rape are down slightly. The total number of crimes committed on NYCHA developments has plateaued, too (Figure 2).

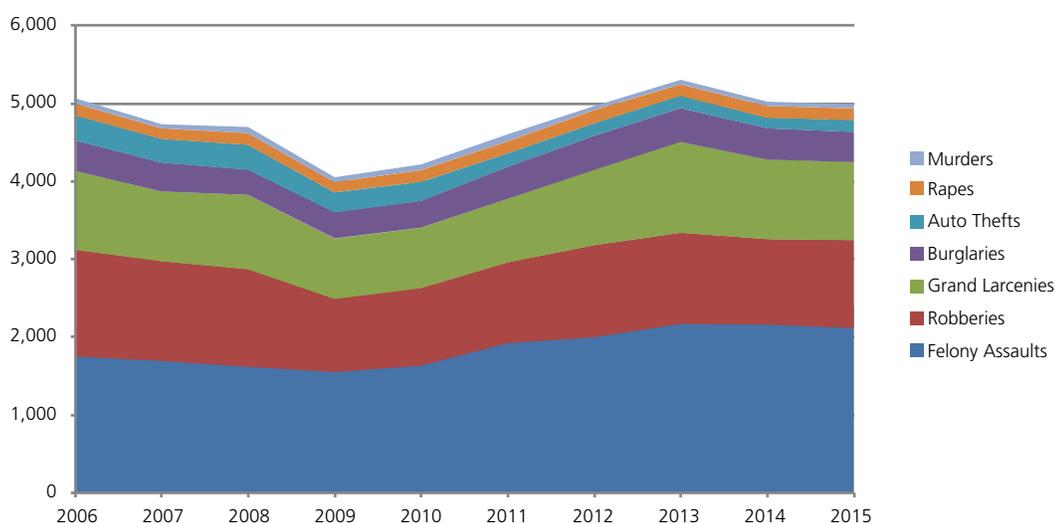
Figure 1. Crime in NYC—Excluding NYCHA Developments, 2006–15*



*2014 and 2015 data cover January–September.

Source: for 2006–13, see http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/downloads/pdf/analysis_and_planning/seven_major_felony_offenses_2000_2014.pdf; for 2014–15, see NYPD Housing Bureau Crime Analysis: Detailed Crime Comparison, Compstat Period Ending October 11

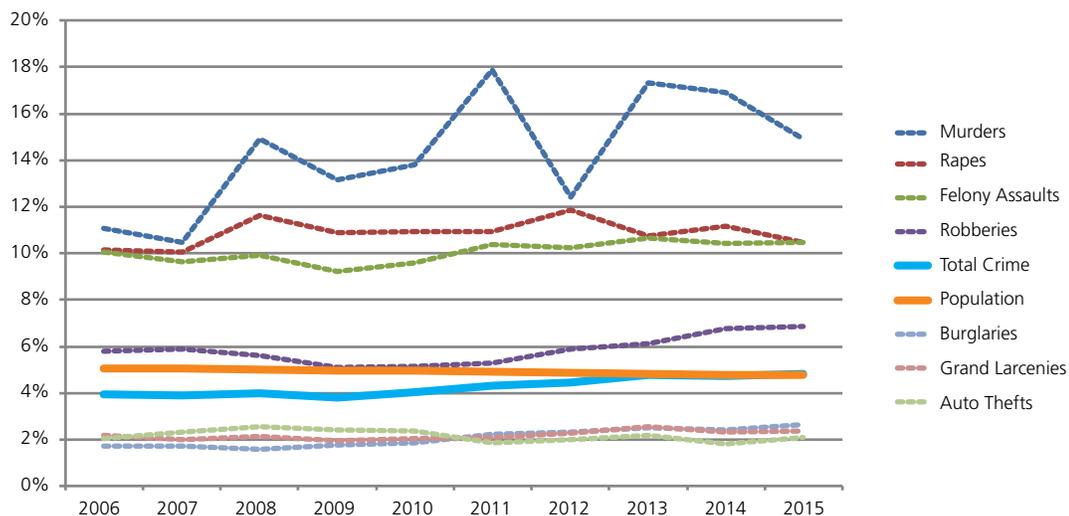
Figure 2. Crime in NYCHA Developments, 2006–15*



*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

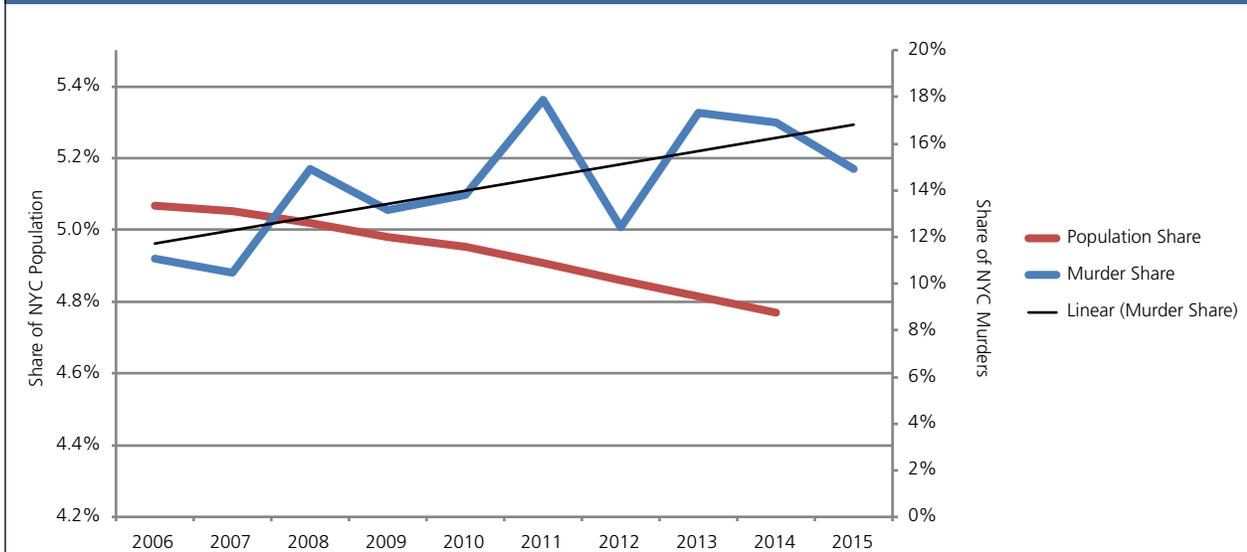
Figure 3. NYCHA Developments: Share of NYC Crime and Share of NYC Population, 2006–15*



*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 4. NYCHA Developments: Share of NYC Murders 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

II. CONCLUSION

Since 2006, New York’s public-housing projects have grown steadily more dangerous, for violent and nonviolent crime alike, relative to the rest of the city. Under Mayor de Blasio’s watch, little has changed: murders and rapes, as a share of the city total, have edged down; robberies, burglaries, and other property crimes have edged up; and total crime (as a share of the city total and absolutely) has remained largely constant.

In July 2014, Mayor de Blasio announced a comprehensive \$210 million plan to reduce crime in NYCHA developments, with a special focus on the 15 most dangerous public-housing projects.⁶ If Mayor de Blasio is to fulfill his pledge to improve the quality of life of New York’s poorest residents, he will have to do more to bring crime in NYCHA developments down to the same low levels enjoyed elsewhere in New York.

ENDNOTES

1. See http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2014/01/ny_minute_deblasio_-_take_dead_aim_at_tale_of_two_cities.html.
2. For 2006–13 data, see <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nyc-crime/nycha-residents-live-fear-major-crimes-public-housing-soar-article-1.1747195>. For 2014–15 data, see NYPD Housing Bureau Crime Analysis: Detailed Crime Comparison, Compstat Period Ending October 11.
3. The author counts only the NYCHA's 403,000 legal residents. See <http://www1.nyc.gov/html/nycha/downloads/pdf/factsheet.pdf>. While the number of illegal residents (including subletters and squatters) is unknown, the total number of NYCHA residents, legal and illegal, could be as high as 600,000. See <http://nymag.com/news/features/housing-projects-2012-9>.
4. See <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/de-blasio-revives-tale-of-two-cities-in-state-of-the-city-address-6702270>.
5. Average family income in the NYCHA's 334 developments is \$23,150. See <http://www1.nyc.gov/html/nycha/downloads/pdf/factsheet.pdf>.
6. See <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/336-14/fact-sheet-making-new-york-city-s-neighborhoods-housing-developments-safer#/0>. "The \$210.5 million investment consists 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."

