

Stephen Gutowski (00:02.37)

All right, welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to another episode of the Weekly Reload Podcast. I'm your host, Stephen Gutowski. I'm also a CNN contributor and the founder of thereload.com where you can head over and take advantage of our third anniversary sale today. If you want to get a membership and get exclusive access to hundreds of pieces of analysis, you will not find anywhere else. If you have not read our work yet, you could also of course sign up for our free weekly newsletter to get an idea of the kind of sober serious approach we take to firearms journalism here at The Reload.

This week we will be discussing good news actually. The murder rate is down about 20% through the early part of 2020 for here and so are mass shootings. And in order to discuss these trends, I wanna bring on an expert, somebody who's being cited across the media landscape for his analysis of crime data and his collection of it. We have with us Jeff Asher from A.H. Datalytics. Welcome to the show or back to the show, Jeff.

Jeff Asher (01:02.222)

Thanks for having me back.

Stephen Gutowski (01:03.506)

Yes, yes, it's good to have you. We talked to you last year when it looked like the murder spike was receding and we were going to have a record downturn in the murder rate last year and that's exactly what ended up happening, right? And now this year, it seems like we have more good news. First off, can you tell people just a little bit about yourself and then give us the update on where we are today?

Jeff Asher (01:27.81)

Yeah, I run a data analytics consulting company that I founded five years ago with my partner, Ben, and we provide analytic services to largely in the criminal justice space, but outside of it as well doing analysis of criminal justice, law enforcement, prosecutor, DA type issues, work with advocacy groups, work with law enforcement, work with prosecutors. So all sorts of different

companies and organizations that just sort of need analytical help. So one of the things that we've done is created a year to date murder dashboard, which we collect as much publicly available data as possible and put it on the web so that you can see what the trend looks like. It's not, right now I think we're at 215 or 217 cities of data with murder down just about 20%.

in that sample and historically we can see that if you have a large enough sample of cities it should be pretty predictive of the national trend. At this point in the year it's usually off four to six percent a sample of this size so I wouldn't expect precision from this but even at this point of the year it's pretty highly suggestive of a large decline happening in 2024.

Stephen Gutowski (02:52.802)

Mm. OK, so we're still

preliminary here. We're still early in the year. It's only April. But the signs are good for the trend that we, everybody wants to see the murder rate go down, especially after several years of it going up quite a lot. Right. And so the early numbers are positive. Can you tell us a little bit about how you collect those, these numbers exactly? Because, you know, I, I use people that I think are a lot used to relying on the FBI and their annual crime data report.

Jeff Asher (02:57.002)

Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (03:25.24)

obviously you have to wait until well into the next year before you get insights from that but how do you go about collecting this data and how close does it get to those FBI numbers in the end?

Jeff Asher (03:38.958)

So it should get pretty close, usually within one or two percentage points of where the FBI is going to come in. That's where I would expect to be with a sample of this size. The FBI won't publish their 2024 numbers until October 2025. So this is a way of shortcutting that lengthy process to tell us what's happening now. And the way we do it is we go out and we Google it. And you go to different agencies websites and you go to...

A lot of states like Texas will produce the data monthly, and usually one or two weeks after a month ends, they're publishing data for their state's agencies. So it's not a hugely tedious process, but it allows for really rich insights into what's happening.

Stephen Gutowski (04:24.294)

Okay, so it's actually fairly similar to how the FBI does it then because the FBI relies on local law enforcement agencies to report their records to the FBI, right? So, I mean, you're obviously you don't have maybe the pull of what the FBI does when they ask law enforcement to send records to them, although

the FBI is not always getting all the records we'd like to see them get. But, uh, but yeah, basically you're going out and you're getting what these, uh, cities produce and put out and publish, uh, every, every month or however frequently they do it. And those, that's where it comes. So this is all official source, uh, data.

Jeff Asher (05:02.562)

Yeah, it's all preliminary, but kind of the motto is that perfection is the enemy of good enough. And if we only seek perfection, one, we're never going to get it. And two, you lose the ability to understand what's happening as it's happening.

Stephen Gutowski (05:18.763)

Right, right, absolutely. And so you've obviously this is hundreds of cities. I think you had a couple of little more breakdown beyond that as well. Can you tell us about some of the interesting insights that you've seen in the data so far?

Jeff Asher (05:34.466)

Well, there's reasonably widespread decline, kind of what you would expect from a 20% decline. It's not just New York has seen a 70% decline and no one else has seen any decline. Cities of every size are seeing large declines. There are, I believe, 19 cities that at this point last year had 40 or more murders and murders down in 16 of them. So...

the places that have the most murders tend to have the most murders are for the most part seeing declines. It's not everywhere. Memphis is about even. Los Angeles is up slightly. Baton Rouge, Louisiana is seeing a large increase. So there are certainly places that are seeing increases and places that are not, but for the most part, the national trend is kind of all going in the same direction.

Stephen Gutowski (06:26.802)

Okay, so it's not just an outlier large city that happens to be doing well, that's pulling the whole average down. It's really something across the board with outliers here and there. Okay, interesting. And so is that basically what you saw last year as well? And what did last year end up as? How much did the murder rate drop?

Jeff Asher (06:37.504)

Yeah, absolutely.

Jeff Asher (06:48.446)

Last year in our sample it was down around 12 percent so this isn't quite double that but it's close to double that. So we would expect from this sample again something to change. There's a lot of year left but for the most part I would expect a large decline, possibly bigger than last year's decline to happen this year.

Stephen Gutowski (07:14.39)

And that would be remarkable, right? Because last year's decline was like a record, wasn't it?

Jeff Asher (07:20.554)

If it's not a record, it's close to it. It's hard to say what the FBI's estimates will come out as, but the largest previous decline was under 10%. It was, I think, 9.1 or 9.6%, somewhere in that range, in 1996. So the previous largest decline was not even double digits. Anything in double digits would be the largest one-year decline ever, and in terms of both the percentage decline and the number of fewer people murdered from one year to the next.

Stephen Gutowski (07:49.406)

raw numbers and their percentage. Wow. And you're saying that right now, the 2024 numbers are on track to be like a double that, like the decline being twice as good as last year.

Jeff Asher (08:02.058)

Yeah, so far, again, you know, lots of seven months left or eight months left. I don't know how many months are left. Um, lots of time left for things to change or things to regress to where that would be normal, more normal historically. But what we've seen is what we've seen so far.

Stephen Gutowski (08:18.314)

Yeah, that's incredible, really. I've talked to a couple of other experts about this. We did a story on this based on, in large part, on the data that you've collected and published. But I spoke with Professor James Onfox from Northeastern University, and I spoke to Dr. James Densley, who helps run the violence project. And they both seem to consider the...

This was kind of a phenomenon that you might call a reversion to the mean, right? This is, this is something where there you're seeing a retraction because you had previously seen this, this great expansion in the murder rate during the pandemic. What do you make of that? Is that how you view this, this remarkable decline in murder rate?

Jeff Asher (09:10.562)

Sort of. I think that reversion of the mean is plausible, but there was nothing inherent that this was going to happen regardless of whatever anybody did. There's no reason to suspect that in 2023 we would start to see a large decline and we would see it accelerate into 2024.

the I think the main challenge to understanding is that we still don't understand what happened in the 90s. So fully understanding it is very difficult at this point. I think that COVID going to the background sort of helped push it along that it was the pandemic exited the pandemic phase. And for most Americans, it's just sort of in the background of everyday life. You don't really think about it a ton. And

I think that a lot of the spending that was...

taking place, especially state and local government spending, state and local government hiring, spending by nonprofits and relaunching philanthropic programs, kind of the tools that you would expect to interrupt a cycle of violence that started in 2020, that weren't really available in 2020 and 2021, started to come back into play. And so I think that that's sort of the most compelling answer as to what helped drive it down, even if you can't say that the pandemic

Stephen Gutowski (10:20.59)

Hmm.

Jeff Asher (10:35.6)

lack of government spending drove it up, I think those things probably tried to help try to bring it down.

Stephen Gutowski (10:40.498)

Interesting. Yeah. You know, that's something I've always kind of thought myself as well, looking at crime and why, why it is the way it is and why we had much higher rates in the 80s and 90s and then much lower rates through most of the 2000s and 2010s. And then we had the, I mean, it seems pretty clear that the murder spike was somehow related to the pandemic, given the timing. But it's, it's always pretty complicated to try and

work out exactly what is called because if we could right then you just would do the things that prevent murder right um everyone would be for doing that but it's you know in practice it's a lot more complicated than that right

Jeff Asher (11:22.678)

Yeah, and it's hard to even measure it. And so that makes it exceptionally difficult to figure out exactly what causes it. And if you can't figure out what causes it, how do you stop it? It's a very, I think, difficult challenge in front of people trying to reduce gun violence and reduce murder.

Stephen Gutowski (11:40.53)

Yeah, certainly. But, but definitely, I think the, that concept you've got there of there were fewer resources to try and prevent murder or try to deal with the murder spike during the pandemic because of lockdowns or funding problems or, uh, you know, social upheaval that came along with it as well. Um, and then

those assets kind of returned across the country at the same because that's another thing like this is a nationwide phenomenon appears it's not just one city implemented a new program and they had great success this is across the board situation and that would fit with that I suppose but yeah I mean I guess we can't we can't necessarily draw a perfectly hard point on this but that what you're saying does make a lot of sense to me

Jeff Asher (12:06.699)

Yeah.

Jeff Asher (12:29.422)

Good. Makes sense to me too.

Stephen Gutowski (12:32.191)

Yeah, it's not really a question there. But yeah, no, so I mean, I believe one of the things that you wrote as well was if the trend continues in this direction, the way that it's gone, even I think if it the decline reduces by half, you were still going to be by the end of the year.

Jeff Asher (12:33.858)

Yeah

Stephen Gutowski (12:53.634)

back to the pre-pandemic levels, to the 2015, 2019 levels of murder in the United States. What do you expect to happen when we get to that? Are we going to, do you think we'll continue to go down? Do you think it'll level off back to where it had been? What do you foresee?

Jeff Asher (13:12.494)

I mean, I think that's an excellent question and I wouldn't dare to hazard a guess. I would say that there's no reason it can't inherently continue to fall. You know, murder reached a nadir in 2014. There's no reason that the 2019 level is the level we should expect. The 2019 level was different from the 2016 level, which was different from the 2014 level. So there's no reason we can't expect to see continued declines. But...

If it doesn't happen, it also wouldn't be shocking given how little we understand of the drivers.

Stephen Gutowski (13:45.464)

Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (13:48.938)

Right. Yeah. It just feels like there's so much we still just don't know for sure. I mean, there's obviously a lot of political debates around different policies, how, how many police are appropriate, what, what sort of controls in the police are needed. Obviously that was a huge debate during the pandemic, um, uh, you know, criminal justice reform, what, what actually works to reduce crime and what doesn't, it just feels like we don't really have a total grasp on this as a society at this point.

Jeff Asher (14:18.05)

No, not at all. Which is frustrating. I mean, we don't even measure these things. So how do you solve them if you don't measure?

Stephen Gutowski (14:19.403)

Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (14:25.334)

Speaking of which, the FBI, I think last time you were on, we talked about this a bit because I alluded to it earlier, the FBI's report, they decided to change their methodology for collecting crime data right in the middle of this murder spike that we experienced. So how are things going today from your perspective with the nation's sort of premier report on crime data, the one that everybody turns to at least in media and that most Americans are

of when they when they discuss crime statistics if that's something that most Americans discuss.

Jeff Asher (15:01.058)

So it's substantially improved. They made a change to where they're allowing agencies to report the old system that aren't reporting into the new system, NIBRS. And so they got participation that was very close to what they traditionally get, like 93 or 94% in 2022.

in 2023, I'm expecting that their neighbors participation, which was in 2020 was 60%, will probably be approaching the mid 80% range. I don't know the exact figures. And then, so you have 2023 and.

You have the SRS data coming on top of that and you should be in fairly decent shape. New York NYPD is now Nibers compliant. So they're one of the agencies that are reporting. That's obviously a huge get. There are agencies that are not Nibers compliant. A handful are working on it. I know LAPD is working on it, but for the most part, agencies that aren't Nibers compliant may just not be reporting full crime data in the future. And that's going to be okay because most of them are going to be small and not contribute a ton.

is basically where we're at.

Stephen Gutowski (16:09.39)

But things have improved and when this 2023 report comes out later this year for last year's crime from the FBI, you think that will be more representative than the previous couple of reports we've seen.

Jeff Asher (16:22.698)

Yeah, the 2022 report was pretty good. It was in terms of breadth of information covered, trustworthiness of the estimates. It was nothing like the 2021 report. I would expect that trend upwards to hopefully continue.

Stephen Gutowski (16:40.014)

Hmm. Okay. That makes sense. Uh, now, so let's, let's move on now to an even harder topic to, uh, discuss because we, uh, I think the trends are even harder to follow and the data is even more complex, uh, which is mass shootings, right? Mass shootings by the violence project definition, which is, uh, derived from a congressional research service, uh, report that came out in, in 2015, but that's, you know, this.

This is the one I find most reliable. We can discuss a little bit the different definitions that exist and the pros and cons of each of them. But under this definition, which is four or more people killed in a single incident in public.

for reasons that aren't related to, you know, gang violence or other criminal activity, there has not been so far this year a single incident of that type in the United States. And then if you go to some of the other definitions, the expanded ones, if you look at just four or more people killed in an incident, this is actually the most common of the sort of mass shooting where you're measuring by how many people have been actually murdered.

That's down. I think there's been nine. Basically these are usually when someone, sadly murders their family in their home. Much more common than people I think realize. That doesn't get the sort of media coverage. This is another

reason why I think the first definition is good because that's what, when.

When people think of mass shootings and you think of media coverage and this is what those types of shootings are what people what actually gets covered in national media. They might use different count they might use the broader count the gun violence archive count a lot of a lot of media outlets will use that but they actually cover.

Stephen Gutowski (18:28.31)

the shootings that show up in the violence projects definition. But regardless, the four or more people killed the sort of a family side that you see that's down from 15 to nine, according to a professor, James Allen Fox, so far this year, and then even the gun violence archive definition, which is just four or more people injured and in any sort of incident could be gang related or what have you. Um, that's fallen as well. That's down about 30%.

as of today, we're April 19th here. Just to be clear, because these things will change most certainly. And I guess I'm just wondering what, what if anything do you make of that? Especially the absence of those higher profile type events. Do you think that tells us anything about where we might end up by the end of the year?

Jeff Asher (19:20.27)

I don't love the other definitions, and I know we can talk about methodological issues, but I'm just thinking that there was a shooting on last week here in New Orleans, 11 people were shot outside of a nightclub, one was killed. That doesn't count as a mass shooting in the definition of the violence project. But like 11 people shot.

Stephen Gutowski (19:49.314)

Right. Or the Kansas City Super Bowl parade would also not fall into the violence project definition. Mm-hmm.

Jeff Asher (19:53.662)

Yeah, exactly. So if you're ignoring that, and I think by the violence project definition, there's never been a mass shooting in New Orleans, which I tend to remember having checked. And so it, I think,

Stephen Gutowski (20:04.138)

Right. I'm not positive, but that could be the case.

Jeff Asher (20:14.15)

raises questions about the validity of any findings if the definition is so strict. I like the gun violence archive definition. I like how accessible it is and I like that how it just for more people shot. It's a very... It does a little bit, but what we saw... I mean, part of the problem with that definition is that it's like as shootings go up, mass shootings go up. But...

Stephen Gutowski (20:29.026)

So doesn't that have the opposite problem?

Stephen Gutowski (20:40.65)

Right. Well, actually, that's one interesting thing. Just to zero in on, let's just talk about the Gun Violence Archive real quick. Because I think what you said there makes would be logical, right, that because the Gun Violence Archive definition just captures a lot more shootings generally, and they're shootings that look more like your what's typical kind of gun violence in the United States.

Stephen Gutowski (21:06.998)

you would expect that it would fluctuate with the murder rate, right? And, but it hasn't really. Uh, and that's kind of, kind of odd. Like last year, the mass shooting count from gun violence archive was actually up slightly from the previous year. Um, yeah.

Jeff Asher (21:23.114)

Yeah, and...

I wrote about that, that what you saw in the gun violence archive data was that just like in, with regular shootings, mass

shootings skyrocketed in 2020 and we're up in 2021. And then what we saw in 2022 and 2023 is that shootings fell in the gun violence archive data, shooting victims fell as they should have given that murder fell, but mass shootings didn't. And so you went from like 4% of all shooting victims were shot in a mass shooting.

in 2019 to a rising percent that was six, six and a half percent in 2023. That seems to be reversing. And so it's, I think it's interesting that we are finally starting to see a decline in mass shootings that's equally large relative to, um, the overall decline in.

in all other shootings, the mass shooting decline was almost 40% through February-ish. So it has come down a little bit, but still substantially fewer mass shootings this year than in previous years.

Stephen Gutowski (22:28.53)

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Under that, yeah, it is interesting. I mean, this is, I guess this gets to the core of why it's hard to talk about mass shootings because like, what are you, what is your goal? What are you trying to measure? Right. That's why I think the, I prefer the violence project definition is I'm, what I want to see are these types of, uh, high spectacle shootings that people associate with that term. And I think that something like a street crime,

Jeff Asher (22:39.211)

Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (22:59.164)

are a different issue, like it's a different problem. This is also why I don't think that the fact we haven't had any mass shootings on the violence project definition doesn't really tell us much about whether we're going to have a lot this year or not because they're pretty sporadic.

There's not really a trend line if you look back through when these things occur throughout the last 20 years or so. Like for instance, 2022, there wasn't a mass shooting under the violence project definition until May, until the middle of May. And then there were three in a pretty short period of time and you ended up with, I believe, seven that year, which is about another remarkable thing I think we could get into, but.

since 2017, you've had between seven and nine violence project mass shootings since each year, except for 2020, where I think probably, you know, uh, the, um, fact that we had a lot of lockdowns and there just weren't a lot of public gatherings, large crowds probably contributed to the fact that there were only two mass shootings that year, but, um, yeah. So, and then

you know, for me, I want to try and separate. And violence projects not a perfect definition for that fact because, I mean, the other interesting thing about the sort of.

stability of the number of these events per year is that, uh, they're only counting ones where somebody actually has killed four or more people. Right. So not somebody who has attempted to carry out that type of attack, but somebody who actually did it and, and managed to kill four, four more people. And so the FBI's active shooter definition and their report might be a little bit more, um,

Jeff Asher (24:37.899)

Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (24:49.394)

indicative of how many people are trying to do this every year. But the weird thing about that is there's doesn't seem to be any correlation really between how many people attempt that, or at least how many active shooter incidents there are per year and how many actually. And, you know, end up with four more killed, which is kind of wild. There doesn't seem to be any correlation. If you look at like the last report of active shootings, there were more attempts in.

They're like double the number of attempts in 2022 than there were in 2019. But those years had about the same number of actual, um, incidents where four more people were killed. And, and so it could be extremely difficult to try and

correlate anything here with, with those sorts of events. Uh, right.

Jeff Asher (25:40.214)

Yeah, it is. And I think to your point about the gun violence archive being a little not restrictive enough. I mean, perhaps you kind of meet in the middle and you say eight or more victims or something like that. I think that would be more telling. I'm just I think that we lose so much. There are so few shootings that are.

that match the violence projects definition, that it makes it difficult, I think, to figure out what is the cause of the changing, other than 2020, which I agree, is probably just to everybody, nobody was outside. And so it's hard to have, meet the definitions that they have set up. I guess, yeah, the idea I...

Stephen Gutowski (26:27.038)

I guess my bigger issue with the gun violence archive definition is not that they use injured instead of killed. It's more that they don't filter the types of incidents they are. That's what to me makes it harder to use as a useful gauge. It certainly tells you something that I guess...

Because a lot of these incidents, it's like people are shooting at, there's a shootout or they're shooting at a particular target and they don't necessarily care that there's collateral damage. That's kind of what the like the Kansas City Super Bowl parade thing seemed to turn out to be. Or probably a lot of the shootings you're describing in Louisiana would probably fit that definition of like they're not necessarily trying to kill the bystanders. They just don't care, right, that someone else is getting injured. Whereas like a lot of stuff that the

Jeff Asher (27:05.719)

Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (27:21.566)

gets tracked to the Vines Project one, that's your indiscriminate killing of large numbers of people, that's the purpose of what they're doing. Does that make any sense? As far as the distinction goes there, or why I would see my issue with the two definitions.

Jeff Asher (27:40.438)

Yeah, I think it does. I guess for me, what I want to measure is things going up, things going down. And so it's a lot easier to do that with a less restrictive definition. And so I think that that's probably where my bias comes in.

Stephen Gutowski (27:53.834)

Yeah. So that, um, you know, one of the interesting notes though, there, because I don't think the gun violence archive count is totally useless. Right. Um, it certainly gives you like, at the very least, uh, this mass violence, like there's a, you know, people getting injured in a single incident more than four is, is this, uh, that's an interesting thing to track, even if it's, um, there's maybe different reasons for why that's happening. Um, and you were saying that one of the things I guess is noticeable is that

There were fewer shootings, but more of them were these incidents where people were injured in it. What does that tell you about, I guess, crime trends?

Jeff Asher (28:33.902)

Well, I don't know. And I think that that's it's a mystery as to why that would be, because I would expect them to go in the same direction as I would expect shootings and mass shootings to both kind of go together. And they didn't, at least in. In twenty, twenty three, you went from I'm just pulling up the numbers here, but.

Stephen Gutowski (28:50.314)

last year.

Jeff Asher (28:56.15)

You went from in 2018, about 4.3% of shootings were mass shootings, um, to in 2023, it was 6.4%, which is just, it's



weird to not see them go in the same direction. And now you've started to see the turnover and hopefully you continue to see it.

Stephen Gutowski (29:14.123)

Yeah.

Yeah, that's the other thing about it is like, when I look at the gun violence archive numbers, I mean, the number of mass shootings that they have tracked have like tripled since I think it was 2014 alone, which is obviously not reflected in the murder rate. It certainly has an, yeah, that's what I was wondering too.

Jeff Asher (29:30.358)

Yeah.

Jeff Asher (29:39.05)

Right. And I think that some of that might be just better sourcing for them. I don't, I don't understand under the hood how they do it. So I don't know the degree.

Stephen Gutowski (29:46.457)

Yeah.

Even then, even then, uh, one thing I thought could be like, this is why it's also gets, all these are hard to do, right? Like it's just, they're not easy to, it's even harder to track these kinds of mass shootings than it is just murders or shootings. Um, but one thing that could be happening with the gun violence archive is that, uh, this was not how people tracked mass shootings before they came out with their, uh, their tracker and their tracker has gotten a lot of attention in this time period and it's used by most media outlets now.

And so that might actually have an effect on media outlets producing stories that talk about how far more people were injured in the, whatever incident they're reporting on like it because it gets more attention as part of this, this focus, not as good or bad thing. I just think it's something that might be affecting what, cause obviously it doesn't seem right that there would have been a tripling of these events.

over that period of time, because there wasn't like a matter, I mean, other than the murder spike that we saw, the violent crime spike that we saw in the two year period around the pandemic, there wasn't this huge increase in murder or shootings generally in the United States, right?

Jeff Asher (31:01.65)

I mean there was certainly an increase from 2014 to 2020-2023. Not a tripling, no. It went from about 14,000 murders to about 20,000 murders. So I don't know, I mean I have to imagine it's a sourcing issue, but I don't actually know enough to comment on that firmly. So...

Stephen Gutowski (31:05.282)

Hmm. Right. But not a tripling, right?

Stephen Gutowski (31:24.542)

And do we, so now that we're seeing a decline in the mass shootings in the gun violence archive numbers, and it's actually greater than the murder decline at the moment, do you think that there's some sort of lagging effect there or is this just data noise?

Jeff Asher (31:38.926)

Probably just noise. I mean, I think it's probably going through the same thing that murders are going through, but there's fewer of them. So it's more prone to randomness would be my guess.

Stephen Gutowski (31:49.446)

Do you think that the same sort of effects that we've seen, that you mentioned earlier, these like community violence

intervention or perhaps new funding from, I mean, even the bipartisan Safer Communities Act had funding for violence prevention programs and mental health resources. Do you think any of that is having effect on these sorts of mass shootings on either whatever kind of mass shooting, you know, you want to identify?

Jeff Asher (32:17.55)

I'm sure it has. I'm sure whatever is causing the overall decline is helping to cause the mass shooting decline because you have a thousand shootings and five percent of them are going to be mass shootings. So if you have a reduction from a thousand to eight hundred shootings presuming that you have still roughly that same percentage then yeah you're going to have a smaller smattering of mass shootings.

Stephen Gutowski (32:44.238)

Hmm. Okay. Uh, and so it's switching focus a little bit here to the future. What, what are the sorts of things you're going to be looking for as, as the year goes on? What are some of the indicators that, you know, people might want to keep track of to understand how, uh, how the crime rate is shaping up for the rest of this year? Do you see anything coming up that might, um, change the trajectory that, you know, obviously we were, this is a political,

podcast so uh you know the election is going to be very contentious um you know political violence is not

Unfortunately, a something in our rear view mirror completely here in the United States. I don't know. Is there any potential for the crime to be affected by the election? Or do you see something on the horizon here that, you know, a major case coming at like we saw with George Floyd in 2020, anything like that? Or maybe something the opposite direction that might. Tend to reduce crime.

Jeff Asher (33:50.566)

I mean, anything can happen. I don't know. I'm not going to predict what the last seven months of this year were going to look like. I think that it's highly unlikely that the election itself influences crime trends. I wish it was less of a political football.

than it has been. I mean, we don't argue about who won the Super Bowl. We can argue about other factors of the Super Bowl, you know, whether or not Brock Purdy can help the Niners get over the hump, you know, is Patrick Mahomes the greatest of all time yet? Like, those are arguments we can have and those are good arguments to have, but we don't argue about who won. But yet with this, we argue about whether or not

Stephen Gutowski (34:17.698)

You can't, but yes, go on.

Jeff Asher (34:32.866)

things are going up or down. And so it's a very frustrating conversation to have that argument when the evidence is pretty strong of the direction we should get past that argument and start talking about the causes and the solutions and ways to reverse it in places that are outliers. Just as in 2020, it wasn't helpful to talk about the.

you know, the outlier places where it wasn't rising or that it wasn't so bad and, and it wasn't going up. It's not a big deal. Um, those conversations weren't helpful then. And I think you've kind of seen a switcheroo happening and they're not helpful now.

Stephen Gutowski (35:11.782)

Yeah. Speaking of which, by the way, that brings me to another thought on this whole topic of conversation. Right. I think actually Professor James on Fox was complaining about this on Twitter the other day that, you know, the crime murder rate is dropping. We're not having the same instances of mass shootings. And.

So nobody is covering this. It's not getting much coverage in media. And I don't think that's a new thing, right? And I think a lot of, if you look at the polling, I believe people still think that the crime rate is going up. And people have almost always thought that it's much higher than it actually is. Well, can you?

Jeff Asher (35:47.959)  
to the

Jeff Asher (35:52.418)  
They definitely think it's higher than it actually is. The poll was in November of last year, so I'd be very curious to see what, if Gallup were to do it now, what they would find. I would be hoping to see the opposite.

Stephen Gutowski (36:06.734)  
You think it just takes a little time for that to sink in to people that the crime is coming back down?

Jeff Asher (36:10.142)  
I'm sure it does. And it was up and people tend to only think about it always being up. There's a saying I like that the media doesn't cover the planes that land. And I keep using it and then you keep reading about these like Boeing planes that lost a wing or a tire and they landed safely. And you're like, well, no, don't cover that. You're ruining my analogy. But for the most part, yeah, you base your understanding on it.

Stephen Gutowski (36:26.614)  
Hahaha

Stephen Gutowski (36:32.034)  
Hehehe

Yeah, that...

Jeff Asher (36:38.11)  
anecdote and the anecdotes tell you that there's more of everything now than there was before. And so it's very difficult, I think, for people to gauge what's actually happening. There's been decent media coverage, I think, of the issue. But I wrote about it, what, two weeks ago about introducing the 2024 numbers and the Wall Street Journal had a piece. And I know CNN is working on a piece. So like there's been media coverage and there was certainly media coverage in 2023.

Stephen Gutowski (36:57.634)  
Mm-hmm.

Jeff Asher (37:06.77)  
I don't know because I'm often in the center of the coverage and like I'm often talking to reporters about this whether or not other people think it's being covered adequately or if it's just you know I'm the bullet with all the holes in it and I'm trying to figure out my survivorship bias.

Stephen Gutowski (37:23.655)  
That, yes, that makes sense for sure. Certainly, a mass shooting happening will get much more coverage than a long period where we don't have a mass shooting, but that's maybe a bit different than coverage of your overall crime rate. I do think that there seems to be a pretty historical disconnect between how bad crime and people, how bad crime is and how bad people think it is.

Jeff Asher (37:34.4)  
Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (37:51.466)  
relative, that period of relative calm in the, you know, 2000s through, uh, you know, 2015 or so, um, that, that 15 years where we had those near record low rates, um, which we, I guess seemed to be hopefully headed back towards, but, um, yeah, I, it's interesting, you know, the, uh, but people also right now seem to have a pretty

bleak view outlook on how everything is, the economy and so forth. And yeah, it probably is a lot of hangover from where we just were, right? Because the economy was really bad and the crime rate was really bad for a little while there.

And maybe people will just need some more time to be convinced that it's actually getting better. And this isn't just a blip.

Jeff Asher (38:39.074)

Yeah, and I think that it's gotten harder to convince people. You go out next door and you see two porch pirates, and all of a sudden you think you have this enormous problem, when in reality those might be the two people that stole from porches over the course of a year, where 10,000 packages were delivered. And so you really don't have a problem. But because you're watching on next door on a Ring camera, then it's...

It's suddenly a huge problem in your mind and that's very difficult to interrupt. Um, I'm not doing product placement by the way. I'm just, yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (39:10.762)

Yeah. Secret Amazon affiliate link in the bio. Now, yeah, or that, not that it's not a problem at all, but that maybe it becomes a bigger problem than it really is in your mind, I guess, right?

Jeff Asher (39:26.09)

Yeah. Your ability to sort of put it in context has disappeared.

Stephen Gutowski (39:31.31)

Because certainly murder is still a problem, even if it is coming down. Mass shootings are still a problem, even if it's been almost six months since we had a violence, you know, spectacular one like the one in Maine. But you know, that doesn't mean we should ignore the fact that things are getting better. That's a good thing.

Jeff Asher (39:33.515)

Yeah.

Jeff Asher (39:55.554)

Well, I think people have a hard time differentiating between the trend going down and the level. And

You can, even if we have a 20, let's say we have a 20% decline on top of a 10% decline last year and we have one of the lowest murder rates ever recorded in the United States, 14,000 murders is still too many. There's still work to be done. It, there's no reason it can't rebound like it did after 2014 in the U S. So the, I think when I tend to talk about the level or the trend, people tend to think that that's sort of a acknowledgement or appreciation of the level is as like he's giving an endorsement.

Stephen Gutowski (40:14.902)

Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (40:31.191)

Right.

Jeff Asher (40:32.904)

of the level and I think that they're two totally separate concepts.

Stephen Gutowski (40:37.682)

Yes, yes, I think that is a common misunderstanding, right? The same thing with definitions. I think I'm sure some people think I just want the strictest definition to make it seem like there's fewer and on the other end you get people think that.

Jeff Asher (40:43.714)

Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (40:55.862)

gun violence archive wants the broadest definition so there's you can get as many counted in there as possible or whatever but you know there's reasonable ways to disagree on what you're what you're trying to measure and how you should do it and uh... you know i always welcome the discussion on those fronts too because i don't think that any of these definitions are quite perfect i mean even the active shooter one

Uh, you know, there's 80 active shooter events, I think were, was the number for 2022, but most of them didn't result in anyone being harmed. So it's, it's a little different than, you know, it's not the same thing as, uh, what happened at Sandy Hook or something. You know, it may, someone might've been trying to do that, but it's not. The same thing.

Jeff Asher (41:26.806)

Yeah, don't get me started on that definition.

Jeff Asher (41:36.076)

Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (41:40.81)

if they weren't able to. But you get the idea here. And I think these things are super hard to track through, like you said earlier. I still don't think we have a great explanation for why crime, why the murder rate drops so much in the late 90s, early 2000s, or why it stayed low. It seems like maybe you can...

have a little bit better guess as to why it went up during the pandemic and why it's going back down now, but this sort of short-term event that we've experienced, hopefully, you know, like you said, we don't know that it's going to continue down or that it's going to level off or it might go back up. We have no idea. That's just reality.

And I think this stuff is a lot more complicated than most people want to make it out to be, especially in politics. Everybody wants to say whatever their latest policy proposal is, is going to solve all of the problems that we have, whether with crime or anything else, obviously. But in real life, this stuff's a lot more nuanced, right?

Jeff Asher (42:44.298)

Yeah, absolutely. And it's something that we just, we have not set up an ability to understand it. And I know we could go another hour if we wanted to talk about like the border and the problem of the concept of the immigration crime wave. And I have a sub sack that I'm reluctantly gonna publish in a few weeks. And it's something that like, we're just not set up to measure that. Like the base answer is that we are not set up to measure that.

Stephen Gutowski (42:52.774)

Yes.

Jeff Asher (43:11.87)

And so you can kind of look for like circumstantial evidence that, um, plausibly, you know, maybe if you were seeing a wave, you'd see it along the border. And so let's measure crime in Texas border counties. And, um, but that's not measuring the actual problem. And so there's so many issues that we talk about them and they're just like throwing about as this is the issue and this is a problem. And they're like, well, no, we don't have any way of knowing that.

Stephen Gutowski (43:35.878)

Yep, yep, exactly. But that's why we like to take a different approach here at the reload, a more sober series approach and have, have folks like you on our podcast to go through these things and try to give people a little more insight than just your base level. This is the absolute answer and that's the absolute answer or whatever. Um, so I really appreciate you coming back on and doing that with us today, uh, and going over these, these early crime statistics that, that you have

Jeff Asher (43:53.079)

Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (44:04.918)

collected and published. I think it's super helpful and I hope that you'll be able to come back on in the future and give us another update down the line as to where things actually ended up at the end of 2024 or if we see any sort of significant changes or whatever. I'm sure you will be the first to tell us all. So if people want to follow your work actually and read your pieces directly, where can they do that?

Jeff Asher (44:31.054)

I'm on Substack, [jasher.substack.com](https://jasher.substack.com)

Stephen Gutowski (44:34.35)

All right, I'm a subscriber, so people should head over there and check out your work. You'll get it before it shows up in the Wall Street Journal or on CNN. So if you want to be the first to read Jeff's insights, that's the place to do it. I highly recommend it. And yeah, I appreciate you doing this. And we'll have to have you back on in the future.

Jeff Asher (44:41.166)

There you go.

Jeff Asher (44:52.994)

That sounds great.

Stephen Gutowski (44:54.014)

All right, well that's all we've got for this episode. If you want, again, to become a Reload member, get this show a day early, or an opportunity to appear on the show. Those are two member perks. You, of course, also get access to hundreds of pieces of analysis that you will not find anywhere else. You can go head over to [thereload.com](https://thereload.com), take advantage of our anniversary sale, 20% off, for a limited time here. We don't do a lot of sales, but we're doing one right now. So make sure you head over and take advantage. That's all we've got for you this week. We'll see you guys again real soon.