

# Reducing Gun Violence in Brooklyn

## *A Summary of Findings and Recommendations*

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March 2025

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

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Rely on [evidence](#) to target research, funding, and initiatives to the areas most in need.

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Leverage and grow the [existing strengths](#) of communities.

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Identify and address [drivers of gun violence](#).

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Develop [funding opportunities](#) for gun violence prevention and intervention programs that [encourage collaboration and visibility](#) in the community.

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Invest in [community engagement and cultural competency](#) for law enforcement and other [criminal legal system actors](#).

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Since the peak of violent crime in the early 1990s, New York City experienced a sustained decline in violence, but, like many cities across the country, has seen an increase in violent crime since 2019. In the 67th Precinct in particular, where the East Flatbush neighborhood is located, there were 34.5 shootings per 100,000 people in 2022. There are several community-led, government-led, and law enforcement-led initiatives in East Flatbush and surrounding areas to address violent crime and gun violence.

With funding from the New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ), Urban, in partnership with the Kings Against Violence Initiative (KAVI),<sup>1</sup> investigated gun violence and gun violence prevention and intervention initiatives in the 67th Precinct and surrounding neighborhoods through a review of existing literature, analysis of crime and shooting data, and interviews and focus groups with gun violence prevention and intervention initiative staff and community members. A detailed methodology and analysis are included in this study's final report (Robin et al. 2023).

### BROOKLYN'S 67TH PRECINCT

The 67th Precinct comprises East Flatbush, the heart of the precinct, and parts of many other surrounding neighborhoods (figure 1).

East Flatbush is a unique neighborhood in New York City, where its diversity of backgrounds is evident in its businesses. Community members and anti-violence staff that participated in interviews and focus groups noted strengths of the community, including the tapestry of diverse small businesses, community events, and the collaborative nature of the community. However, several community members noted that gentrification is eating away at those strengths. Some focus group participants speculated that the weakening of connections between neighbors may contribute to gun violence. Other drivers of gun violence identified by community members and anti-gun violence intervention staff include poverty and a lack of resources and opportunities, a lack of education and enrichment opportunities, unaddressed mental health needs, a lack of skills in peaceful conflict resolution, the increased ease of obtaining a gun, and the influence of current media including music and video games.

FIGURE 1

## Brooklyn's 67th Police Precinct



Source: "Police Precincts," NYC Open Data, accessed November 2023, <https://data.cityofnewyork.us/Public-Safety/Police-Precincts/78dh-3ptz>.

### GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION INITIATIVES IN THE 67TH PRECINCT

Many different gun violence prevention, interruption, and intervention initiatives exist in the 67th Precinct, including those led by criminal legal system actors and those led by community members. The New York City Police Department uses targeted enforcement strategies and community policing to address gun violence in the 67th Precinct.<sup>2</sup> The department also partners with the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office to sponsor gun buybacks.<sup>3</sup> Project Fast Track, an initiative of former mayor Bill de Blasio to address gun violence in Brooklyn, combines efforts of multiple local agencies to tackle gun possession cases.<sup>4</sup> The NYC government supports two community antiviolence initiatives in the 67th Precinct: the Crisis Management System and the Public Safety Coalition (described below). The Crisis Management System adapted the Cure Violence model of violence interruption in 22 sites across the city, including the 67th Precinct, to respond to neighborhood conflict with resources for healing, deescalation, and supportive networks, particularly for young adults with risk factors for victimization and engaging in violence.<sup>5</sup>

The 67th Precinct Public Safety Coalition, also known as the 67th Precinct Clergy Council and the GodSquad, is a unique faith-based community mobilization effort against gun violence that launched in 2010 and includes clergy, community groups, and neighborhood leaders that partner with the mayor's office and other criminal legal system actors, including the 67th Precinct.<sup>6</sup> The coalition serves as a liaison between the community and law enforcement, trains faith leaders in gun violence prevention, engages with young people at risk of engaging in gun violence, and provides services to victims of gun violence and their families.<sup>7</sup> Public Safety Coalition members shared the importance of acknowledging the unique role clergy play in communities, particularly in response to

tragedy. Having clergy involved allows the intervention to support community members through every stage of grief including funerals, which is unique to faith-based models. Coalition members also discussed the role of faith leaders as a bridge between community members and law enforcement.

In addition to these initiatives, we identified five other community-led initiatives operating in the 67th Precinct: East Flatbush Village,<sup>8</sup> Elite Learners,<sup>9</sup> KAVI,<sup>10</sup> Man Up!,<sup>11</sup> and Save Our Streets.<sup>12</sup> In the intricate landscape of addressing gun violence, multiple organizations are actively engaged, each contributing unique strategies and approaches to mitigate the pervasive issue. Through interviews and focus groups with anti-gun violence staff, we found that community initiatives include different combinations of prevention and intervention activities. Anti-gun violence programs implement a multifaceted approach to address and mitigate the pervasive issue of gun violence, including provision of emotional-regulation and conflict-resolution classes, direct dialogue with gangs, school programming, community events, workforce development programs, rehabilitation and reentry programming, victim services, mental health services, and restorative justice. These organizations also play a crucial role in diffusing tensions between communities and law enforcement, often acting as intermediaries, physically placing themselves between the two to ease strained relationships. Collectively, these strategies underline a holistic approach that addresses the root causes of violence while providing support, education, and guidance to prevent and counteract the perpetuation of gun-related issues in communities.

### ***Community Perceptions of Anti-Gun Violence Interventions***

Community members who participated in focus groups and interviews generally expressed negative views of the police. One participant who had been a victim of gun violence said that police treat people differently depending on “where you [are] from and what you look like....Your skin is your sin nowadays.”<sup>13</sup> Another who had been a victim of gun violence said, “We can do without [the police].”<sup>14</sup> When asked how police respond to shootings, participants said that police come to the scene of the shooting to take a report, but they generally do not follow up afterwards, and they are often quick to shoot when responding to gun violence. Participants across focus groups emphasized that there is a lack of trust in the police among community members, which can hinder investigations into gun violence because community members are reluctant to provide information to the police for fear of being arrested. Participants also expressed negative opinions of other criminal legal system actors. Some participants felt that judges and prosecutors have little knowledge of the communities over which they have authority, which leads to discriminatory and disproportionate sentences. As one participant said, “They can’t be outsiders overseeing communities and people they don’t understand.”<sup>15</sup>

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*We can do without [the police]. –67th Precinct community member*

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Community members who participated in focus groups and interviews were generally unaware of the community-based organizations in the 67th Precinct doing work to reduce gun violence. In a focus group with people who had been directly victimized by gun violence, participants were unaware of any organizations besides KAVI, which had recruited them for the focus group. Some participants in other focus groups were aware of Man Up! because its staff engaged in highly visible street outreach. A few other participants had heard of Save Our

Streets. Participants across focus groups agreed that antiviolence organizations are not visible enough in the community. Some may have physical locations, but one participant said that the offices are frequently closed and speculated that this may be due to a lack of funding.

Due to a lack of awareness about these programs, community members who participated in focus groups and interviews had limited opinions of the programs' effectiveness. Participants who were aware of KAVI had a positive opinion of it and reported that the staff were responsive to their needs while they were in the hospital and helped them persist through the rehabilitation process. One participant was also aware of Man Up! and had a positive view of its work in the community.

### ***Barriers and Opportunities for Community-Led Anti-Gun Violence Strategies***

Key barriers for anti-gun violence programs that we identified through interviews and focus groups with anti-gun violence staff and community members include a need for more funding, a lack of supports for staff, a lack of visibility, and a lack of housing for people in crisis. Anti-gun violence organizations face a critical need for resources to grow operations and collaborate with other antiviolence organizations. Within the grant-funded landscape, antiviolence organizations seek opportunities for growth, emphasizing the need for avenues that enable them to expand their initiatives and sustain their vital work. Increased funding holds the key to preventing territorial behaviors among organizations, fostering an environment that promotes collaboration rather than competition. This collaboration is essential for a more unified and effective approach in tackling gun violence. Funding is also critical for increased visibility. Visibility in the community requires a lot of staff. Storefront locations that people can see when walking around the neighborhood also help. Both these things are expensive for antiviolence programs.

Resources are also needed to support anti-gun violence staff in coping with the burnout and trauma inherent in their roles. Offering robust support mechanisms for these organizations' staff becomes paramount to ensure their mental and emotional well-being. These supports require funding.

In addition to supporting the existing workforce, funding is needed to hire more staff. The mere presence of antiviolence workers and organizations in communities has proven to be a deterrent, prompting potential shooters to rethink their actions upon encountering them. Recognizing the significance of personnel, these groups understand the need to have sufficient staff to effectively carry out their missions, envisioning the addition of more members to further propel their impactful work.

Lastly, antiviolence program staff noted the pressing need for increased access to housing for individuals experiencing crises, a resource vital for stabilizing and supporting those affected by the repercussions of gun violence. By addressing these resource needs, anti-gun violence organizations can better equip themselves to navigate the challenges and complexities inherent in their mission to create safer and more resilient communities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on our research findings, we have come up with five recommendations for gun violence prevention and intervention work. We have tied each general recommendation with specific recommendations for the 67th Precinct. Many of the recommendations for the precinct require investment. Government resources are finite, so these recommendations are aimed at identifying the most impactful investments for addressing gun violence in the 67th Precinct.

***Recommendation 1: Rely on Evidence to Target Research, Funding, and Initiatives to the Areas Most in Need***

Local governments should use a combination of crime and shooting statistics as well as community input to identify and routinely assess areas that would be best served by research, funding, and gun violence prevention and intervention initiatives. Analysis of crime and shooting data shows that there are other precincts that have higher rates of violent crime and shootings than the 67th. Additionally, while community members recognize that the area has historically been seen as one of the areas with the most gun violence in New York City, many community members shared that they do not see the neighborhoods in the 67th Precinct that way currently. Combining statistics with knowledge of community perceptions (obtained through surveys or focus groups) will help governments identify the areas most in need of support to address violence.

***Recommendation 2: Leverage and Grow the Existing Strengths of Communities***

All communities have strengths that can be leveraged to support antiviolence efforts, such as strong community ties or thriving local business communities. Identifying and investing in these strengths can aid antiviolence efforts by improving community cohesion and the tangible resources available to community members. If a community has a rich cultural history but lacks ways to engage with that history and share it with others, a museum (for instance, the Anacostia Community Museum in Washington, DC) can raise up this history and build pride in the community around it. If local businesses are a strength of a community, supporting them to ensure their sustainability through investment and by strengthening the business improvement district may be a way to leverage that strength. If a community has many resources available to people (e.g., antiviolence groups, mental health services, grocery stores, food pantries, child care), developing an accessible, user-friendly guide to those resources may help community members find them and help antiviolence organizations understand and leverage them. In East Flatbush, invest in the community in ways that highlight existing resources, strengthen social ties, and support small locally owned businesses. The cultural richness and historical significance of East Flatbush, and the flow of resources into it, present opportunities for growth and development in the neighborhood, but the role of gentrification there may be breaking down the area's strengths. Leveraging these strengths through growth instead may help combat gun violence. Identifying all the local resources available and helping community members find them can aid in this. Capital Planning Explorer already compiles a list of resources, such as libraries, schools, and transportation in New York City, but it is missing many local community resources, such as local businesses and restaurants, and it is not very user-friendly. KAVI staff are considering developing a more comprehensive and more user-friendly mobile application. Another way to leverage these strengths is to invest in small businesses over big chain stores through grants and other government incentives and supports. There also already exist a culture of collaboration and strong community ties in East Flatbush. Building more green space and bike paths to complement the walkability and accessibility of the neighborhood and increasing the number of public community events may help these community ties flourish and grow.

***Recommendation 3: Identify and Address Drivers of Gun Violence***

When designing programs or identifying programs to fund, consider the drivers of gun violence and the specific needs of the community a program operates in. Organizations working to start programs should hold these considerations when they design them. Organizations with existing programs should assess how well those programs align with local needs and make revisions as needed. Governments should identify and invest in programs that specifically address drivers of gun violence in communities. In East Flatbush, invest in mental health care as well as education and enrichment opportunities for young people that teach social-emotional skills and peaceful conflict resolution. Community members and anti-gun violence program staff noted a lack of social-emotional skills and conflict-resolution skills among young people as a driver of gun violence. Community members also noted that COVID took a toll on the community's mental health. Additionally, gun violence is traumatic, leading people to try to cope in unhealthy ways that can further the cycle of violence.

**Recommendation 4: Develop Funding Opportunities for Gun Violence Prevention and Intervention Programs That Encourage Collaboration and Visibility in the Community**

Areas with many interventions may struggle with competition in grant funding environments. A competitive environment among anti-gun violence programs and a lack of visibility may be the two biggest barriers faced by community-led gun violence interventions in the 67th Precinct. In East Flatbush, the New York City government should develop funding mechanisms that support collaboration among programs as opposed to competition and that are sufficient to support staffing needs and increase programs' visibility. Colleges could also have a role in supporting staffing and visibility. One way to increase visibility and community knowledge of programs, while supporting staffing for them, is for anti-gun violence programs to collaborate with local colleges, such as Brooklyn College. In addition to these programs being present at career fairs, internships where students receive college credit and/or stipends could benefit students by providing real-life work experience and benefit the organizations by providing staffing and technical support and raising awareness of their organizations. Other ways anti-gun violence programs can increase their presence in the community include hosting and attending local events, attending and presenting at local community meetings, and canvassing. Storefront offices are also a great way to increase awareness, but the cost of these locations may be prohibitive. Encouraging the building of coalitions (such as the Public Safety Coalition) and providing funding to coalitions is another way to encourage collaboration and resource sharing in efficient and effective ways among anti-gun violence programs.

**Recommendation 5: Invest in Community Engagement and Cultural Competency for Law Enforcement and Other Criminal Legal System Actors**

Community members who participated in focus groups and interviews expressed a desire for police to establish a friendly, noncombative presence in their community and for judges and prosecutors to better understand the culture and dynamics of the community. Community-based anti-gun violence organizations, some of which already partner with criminal legal system actors, can be helpful in providing trainings based on the lessons they learn from working with the community. In East Flatbush, ask community members how law enforcement can best engage with the community and focus community engagement efforts on other criminal legal system actors. There are many community engagement strategies that already exist for the New York City Police Department, but it is unclear whether they foster a trusting relationship. Community members also noted that prosecutors and judges seem out of touch with the communities they serve. Efforts to build community trust with criminal legal system actors should include prosecutors and judges, in addition to law enforcement.

**NOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> "Safer Stronger Neighborhoods by Empowering Youth," Kings Against Violence Initiative, accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.kavibrooklyn.org/>.
- <sup>2</sup> Stephen Groves, "Despite Historically Low Crime Across New York, East Flatbush Still Plagued by Violence," *Bklyner*, February 22, 2018, <https://bklyner.com/east-flatbush-violence/>; "Find Your Build the Block Meeting," New York Police Department, accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.nyc.gov/site/nypd/bureaus/patrol/find-your-meeting.page>.
- <sup>3</sup> Brooklyn Eagle Staff, "Gun Buyback Event to be Held Saturday in East Flatbush," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 12, 2022, <https://brooklyneagle.com/articles/2022/01/12/gun-buyback-event-to-be-held-saturday-in-east-flatbush/>.
- <sup>4</sup> "Archived Initiative: Strategic Enforcement to Drive Down Gun Violence," New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, accessed December 26, 2023, <https://criminaljustice.cityofnewyork.us/programs/strategic-enforcement/>.
- <sup>5</sup> "Interventions," New York City Office to Prevent Gun Violence, accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.nyc.gov/site/peacenyc/interventions/crisis-management.page>.
- <sup>6</sup> "Clergy Council: East Flatbush Public Safety Coalition," New York City Office to Prevent Gun Violence, accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.nyc.gov/site/peacenyc/resources/clergy-council.page>.

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- <sup>7</sup> “Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office and Clergy Councils Announce Strategic Community Partnerships to Help Reduce Gun Violence,” District Attorney, Kings County, May 25, 2021, <http://www.brooklynda.org/2021/05/25/brooklyn-district-attorneys-office-and-clergy-councils-announce-strategic-community-partnerships-to-help-reduce-gun-violence/>.
  - <sup>8</sup> “Our Village,” East Flatbush Village, accessed December 26, 2023, <https://eastflatbushvillage.org/>.
  - <sup>9</sup> “Our Work Makes a Difference,” Elite Learners, accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.elitelearners.org/>.
  - <sup>10</sup> “Safer Stronger Neighborhoods by Empowering Youth,” Kings Against Violence Initiative.
  - <sup>11</sup> “Building a Better Community One Neighborhood at a Time,” Man Up, accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.manupinc.org/>.
  - <sup>12</sup> “Save our Streets (S.O.S.),” Save Our Streets, accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.innovatingjustice.org/programs/save-our-streets-sos/more-info>.
  - <sup>13</sup> Focus group with community members.
  - <sup>14</sup> Focus group with community members.
  - <sup>15</sup> Focus group with community members.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This summary was funded by the New York City Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission. We thank our research partner, the Kings Against Violence Initiative, for its contributions to this study. We also thank every member of the East Flatbush community and surrounding neighborhoods who participated in interviews, focus groups, and data walks. In addition, we thank Daniel Webster of the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions for being an early thought partner for this work. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Funders do not determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of Urban experts. Further information on the Urban Institute’s funding principles is available at [urban.org/fundingprinciples](https://urban.org/fundingprinciples). We thank our research partner, the Kings Against Violence Initiative, for their contributions to this study. We also thank every member of the East Flatbush community and surrounding neighborhoods who participated in interviews, focus groups, and data walks. Copyright © March 2025. Urban Institute. Permission is granted for reproduction of this file, with attribution to the Urban Institute.