

Subway shooting in Brooklyn seized on by New York mayor to boost law-and-order campaign

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12 April 2022

A violent incident in a Brooklyn subway station Tuesday morning left 19 people injured, including 10 with gunshot wounds. Five are in critical condition. Available reports indicate that a man in a green worker's vest and wearing a gas mask released smoke from a canister in a subway car and began shooting, hitting passengers on the train and the adjacent platform. Despite initial reports, no explosive devices have been found.

A rider who claims he came face to face with the shooter before the attack unfolded told the *New York Post* that the man was talking to himself and appeared to be under the influence of drugs. As of this writing, the suspect has not been apprehended and no motive for the attack at the height of morning rush hour is known.

Police reported Tuesday evening that they had located an empty U-Haul rental van which they believe had been used by the shooter. New York City Police Commissioner Keechant L. Sewell told the media Tuesday that the shooting was not being investigated as an act of terrorism "at this time."

Nevertheless, the attack was immediately seized on by the city's new Democratic Mayor Eric Adams, a former New York Police Department (NYPD) captain, to reinforce the law-and-order program which was a principal component of his election campaign. The mayor, who is in isolation after having tested positive for COVID-19 on Sunday, asserted in a video statement that "We will not allow New Yorkers to be terrorized, even by a single individual."

News coverage of the incident is emphasizing the recent increase in violent crime that has occurred in the city. In reality, however, although crime has increased during the two years of the pandemic, it remains lower

than the trend in previous years and lower than in many other large US cities. Incidents involving gun violence in New York City reached a historic low point in 2018 and 2019. That trend reversed concurrent with the onset of COVID-19 and is continuing. As of April 3, there have been 296 shooting incidents in the city so far this year. That compares with 260 during the same period last year.

Despite the clear correlation with the pandemic, the increase in gun violence is being used to justify moves to expand and intensify police activities while at the same time removing the few remaining measures to combat COVID-19, just as the next wave, driven by the BA.2 variant, is accelerating.

On April 6, only a few days before the latest shooting incident in Brooklyn, the NYPD held a briefing at police headquarters in which Police Commissioner Sewell described the increase in gun violence as "continuing and completely unacceptable violence in our streets." Ominously, she continued, "The NYPD will use every resource and opportunity to secure this city." The image of securing the city conjures up the image of a military operation.

Demonstrating the implementation of this crackdown, police have made more than 4,000 felony arrests in March alone, more than double the number during the same period last year. Adams has revived the equivalent of the previously discredited "broken windows" policy which emphasized enforcement against low-level offenses and was criticized for targeting low income and minority youth. He has also resurrected a version of the plainclothes anti-crime units known for their brutality.

The mayor has also become notorious for ordering

the brutal dismantling of homeless encampments and driving the homeless from subway stations.

This emphasis on law enforcement is being developed at the state level as well. The just-passed New York state budget includes a bail reform provision that was specifically promoted by Adams and Governor Kathy Hochul, also a Democrat, which was proposed as a response to the increase in violent crime and gun violence in particular.

The bail provision increases the number of offenses for which a defendant can be required to post cash bail or be remanded to custody while awaiting trial. Given the large backlog in court proceedings, in part due to the pandemic, a defendant who cannot post bail may be incarcerated for many months without having been convicted of any crime, thus affecting most acutely poor and working class individuals.

This “reform” has been championed by both Republicans and many Democrats as a way of reversing a 2019 law that limited the imposition of cash bail in order to lessen the devastating economic, social, and physical impact of long periods of incarceration in New York City’s notoriously overcrowded and violent jails. At least three inmates have already been killed this year at the city’s infamous Riker’s Island jail.

The claim that the 2019 reform has been among the principal causes of the recent increase in violent crime is disingenuous. Violence has increased in many areas across the country since the start of the pandemic without the coincident enactment of New York’s bail reform.

The social and economic impacts of COVID-19 have caused massive disruptions in the lives of millions, leading to frustration and anger, which sometimes result in outbursts of violence. The root cause of this is the criminal, indeed intentional mismanagement of the response to the pandemic by the ruling class, which has amplified the already high levels of poverty and social inequality caused by the decades-long deterioration of the capitalist system, while at the same time filling the pockets of the large corporations and wealthy elite.

The emphasis on crime and law enforcement by the city’s elite is driven by the fear that the social situation is about to explode, as is already evident in many parts of the world due to the eruption of strikes and protests brought on by rapidly accelerating inflation and the continuing impact of the pandemic.



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