

## **Universal Basic Income, Structural Poverty, and Crime Reduction in New York State**

Hongbao Ma, PhD

Candidate for Governor of New York State, 2026

Queens, New York, USA

Ma for New York 2026

Phone: 718-404-5362; Email: [maofornewyork@gmail.com](mailto:maofornewyork@gmail.com); Website: <http://www.maformy.com>

### **Abstract (Supplementary Section)**

This section examines the relationship between poverty and crime and evaluates whether a Universal Basic Income (UBI), combined with targeted law enforcement reform, can significantly reduce poverty-induced criminal activity in New York State. While “zero crime” remains a normative aspiration rather than an empirically guaranteed outcome, the elimination of income-based poverty through UBI may substantially reduce economically motivated offenses. The analysis integrates criminological theory, recent crime statistics, and institutional design considerations.

**Keywords:** poverty; crime; Universal Basic Income (UBI); law enforcement reform

### **1. Poverty and Crime: Theoretical Foundations**

Criminological research consistently identifies economic deprivation as a significant predictor of certain categories of crime, particularly property offenses. According to strain theory and relative deprivation theory:

- Economic stress increases incentives for theft, fraud, and underground economic activity.
- Persistent poverty correlates with higher exposure to criminogenic environments.
- Lack of opportunity structures increases recidivism risk.

However, poverty is not the sole determinant of crime. Violent crime, organized crime, and addiction-related offenses often involve additional structural and psychological variables.

Therefore, it is analytically precise to state:

UBI may reduce poverty-driven crime but cannot independently eliminate all forms of criminal behavior.

### **2. Recent Crime Trends in New York State**

Recent official statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services indicate:

- 2024 violent crime rate: ~380 per 100,000 residents statewide
- Property crime rate: ~1,720 per 100,000
- 2022 index crime increase: approximately 22% (driven largely by property crime)

In New York City:

- Violent crime rate  $\approx$  490 per 100,000 (recent estimates)
- Homicide rates significantly lower than many large U.S. cities
- Property crime fluctuations strongly correlate with economic volatility

These data suggest:

1. New York is not among the highest-crime states nationally.
2. Property crimes respond more sensitively to economic conditions.
3. Crime distribution is geographically uneven.

### **3. Analytical Distinction: Zero Crime vs. Crime Minimization**

The phrase “zero crime” must be analytically clarified.

#### **Normative Definition**

Zero crime = aspiration of maximum public safety and zero tolerance for violent offenses.

#### **Empirical Definition**

Crime rate  $\rightarrow$  minimal sustainable equilibrium under optimal institutional design.

Absolute elimination of crime is statistically unrealistic in any complex society. Therefore, the academically defensible goal is:

Minimize structurally preventable crime.

#### **4. UBI as Crime Reduction Mechanism**

##### **4.1 Income Stabilization Effect**

When UBI guarantees:

Income  $\geq$  \$1,000/month per person,  
then:

- Survival theft incentives decline.
- Financial desperation decreases.
- Debt-induced fraud declines.

This primarily affects:

- Larceny
- Shoplifting
- Non-violent property crimes
- Certain low-level economic offenses

##### **4.2 Risk Buffering Effect**

UBI + universal health coverage reduces:

- Medical bankruptcy stress
- Housing instability
- Desperation-based illegal activity

##### **4.3 Psychological Stability**

Evidence from Finland's UBI experiment indicates:

- Improved mental well-being
- Reduced stress
- Increased perceived social trust

Lower stress correlates with lower impulsive crime risk.

#### **5. Structural Crime Reduction Framework for New York**

Crime reduction requires dual-track strategy:

##### **Track A: Structural Poverty Elimination**

1. Universal Basic Income
2. Universal Basic Health Insurance
3. Affordable housing expansion
4. Labor market access and skills training

##### **Track B: Smart and Targeted Enforcement**

1. Focused deterrence on violent repeat offenders
2. Data-driven policing
3. Evidence-based sentencing reform
4. Rehabilitation and re-entry support

Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) and improved lighting, transit safety, and digital monitoring also contribute to deterrence.

#### **6. What UBI Can and Cannot Do**

##### **What UBI Can Likely Reduce**

- ✓ Poverty-driven theft
- ✓ Economic survival crimes
- ✓ Certain recidivism pressures
- ✓ Income volatility shocks

##### **What UBI Cannot Automatically Eliminate**

- X Organized crime
- X Domestic violence
- X Gang conflicts
- X Drug trafficking networks
- X Crimes driven by mental illness alone

Therefore:

**Proposition 4 (P4).**

UBI significantly reduces economic-motive crime but must be combined with targeted law enforcement and social policy to reduce total crime rates.

**7. Economic Safety and Public Safety Feedback Loop**

Lower crime produces:

- Increased commercial investment
- Higher property values
- Stronger small business formation
- Tourism growth
- Reduced policing and incarceration costs

This creates a feedback cycle:

Economic Security → Crime Reduction → Investment Growth → Tax Revenue Stability → Sustainable UBI Financing

**8. Policy Model for New York State**

An integrated model includes:

1. UBI (\$1,000/month minimum)
2. Universal basic health insurance
3. Focused deterrence on violent crime
4. Technology-enhanced policing (with civil liberties safeguards)
5. Mental health expansion
6. Reentry employment programs
7. Community-based violence interruption programs

Zero tolerance should be defined as:

Zero tolerance for violent crime, not zero tolerance for poverty.

**9. Conclusion**

While absolute “zero crime” is not empirically attainable in complex societies, New York State can plausibly aim for:

- Elimination of income-based poverty
- Significant reduction in poverty-induced crime
- Lower recidivism
- Stabilized public safety

UBI is not a replacement for law enforcement. It is a structural prevention mechanism that removes one of the strongest economic drivers of crime.

Thus, the defensible academic position is:

Income poverty elimination is achievable.

Crime minimization is achievable.

Absolute crime elimination is aspirational.