



“We’re Getting Creamed” – NYC Small Business Owners Struggle To Confront Surge In Shoplifting

Description

USA: New York City’s struggling small businesses are dealing with one of the worst spikes in retail theft rates in recent memory. And owners aren’t sure whether Mayor Eric Adams’ decision to roll back certain COVID restrictions will improve the situation, or make it worse.



The owner of a couple of downtown boutiques said she has never felt “more exhausted” trying to protect her businesses from emboldened shoplifters and criminal crews working small retail businesses.

Someone shattered the front door overnight and ripped out the cash drawer. The new

security gates cost \$2,300. The streets became quieter after four neighboring businesses closed permanently during the pandemic, emboldening shoplifters. Two security guards quit.

For Deborah Koenigsberger, who has worked in retail for three decades, keeping her two clothing stores open in Manhattan's Flatiron neighborhood has never felt so exhausting.

"As small businesses, we are getting creamed right now in so many ways," Ms. Koenigsberger said. "I might as well leave my store door open and say, 'Help yourselves.'"

According to data from [the NYT](#), shoplifting complaints are up 16% over the past year, **while arrests have fallen.**

The debate over the underlying causes has also focused on New York's bail laws, on a police force distracted by a spike in shootings and on online marketplaces where organized retail crews can easily sell stolen goods.

As the city emerges from the public health crisis, officials say a sense of safety is critical to its economic recovery.

Last year, **complaints of retail theft were about 16 percent higher than in 2019**, according to the New York Police Department. But arrest rates have dropped, **with about 28 percent of the complaints resulting in arrests last year**, compared with 48.5 percent in 2019.

An index of major crimes, including murders and felony assaults, was up 7.5 percent in the same period, but still lower last year than in 2015.

NYC Mayor Eric Adams is starting to reconsider bail laws.

The city's new mayor, Eric Adams, is lobbying to toughen the state's bail laws, which were amended in 2019, allowing more people who had been arrested to remain free while their cases were pending. Law enforcement officials blame the changes for making it harder to keep certain defendants, like serial shoplifters, detained after an arrest.

"We can't have a city where our drugstores and bodegas and restaurants are leaving because people are walking into the stores, taking whatever they want on the shelves and walking out," Mr. Adams told the State Legislature recently.

In Manhattan, the heart of the city, the worst-hit neighborhoods are also those that previously relied on commuters, or which harbor the largest number of drug-treatment centers.

In Manhattan, home to the largest share of the city's jobs, neighborhoods struggling the most include those that relied on commuters before the pandemic and those that have a large concentration of drug treatment centers, according to interviews with small business workers.

One reason for the drop in arrests is that there are now more crews targeting small stores with little or no security. **The lack of security personnel causes the odds of arrest to decline.**

The Police Department said one reason the arrest rate had dropped for retail thefts was **because there was more stealing at stores without security guards who were willing to detain shoplifters.**

During the pandemic, organized crews nationwide also increasingly targeted retailers, stealing large quantities of merchandise to resell online.

One veteran NYC store owner said he is seeing more patrons who appear to be on drugs, or who seem "unstable". Ultimately, the fear of being harmed keeps employees from interfering when they see criminals stealing.

Shoplifting, a longstanding issue for small businesses, took on a more unpredictable form in the last year, according to Joseph Lorenzo, the owner of Macson Shoes, a store that has been in Washington Heights for 45 years. He said more people have walked into his shop who appear to be on drugs or mentally unstable.

"The fear and unpredictability of these guys turning violent is what scares us the most," Mr. Lorenzo said.

The owner of a Harlem coffee shop shared one particularly jarring horror story with the NYT.

Last summer, a man walked into the Monkey Cup, a Venezuelan cafe in Harlem, demanding free coffee, according to Laura Leonardi, a co-owner. After receiving one, he began arguing with Ms. Leonardi's husband and punched him in the face, video footage showed. The man then punched Ms. Leonardi after she leapt from the counter. He fled before the police arrived.

In November, **a different man walked in naked while a child was in the shop, refusing to leave. He came back two months later and smashed a stool to pieces.**

Two weeks ago, the man walked in again repeatedly, until a barista pointed him out to a police officer who happened to be in the cafe. **The man was arrested, a scene that Ms. Leonardi described as "horrible in every way."**

Of course, there are still plenty of Democratic politicians in the city who are willing to deny that the city has a crime problem. One state senator from the Bronx, Gustavo Rivera, said the following:

“Communities are safer when they have more resources, not when they’re overpoliced.”

But even Alvin Bragg, the new Manhattan DA who has been widely criticized for his easy-on-crime policies, has decided to backtrack when it comes to shoplifting and theft, forming a task force to “tackle” the issue.

by Tyler Durden

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1. Economy-Business-Fin/Invest
2. Main
3. Politics-Geopolitics-Gov.-Events

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