Where We Stand: 8th Edition

Update 2: Homicides

September 2019

St. Louis has experienced a sharp increase in homicides in recent years, particularly since 2013. Other metro regions across the country have seen similar increases. In 2018 there were at least 348 murders in the St. Louis region.[1] Through August, preliminary estimates indicate there have been at least 190 murders in 2019.[2]

This update is part of the Where We Stand (WWS) series, produced by East-West Gateway since 1992, in which St. Louis is ranked among the 50 most populous U.S. Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs)[3], referred to as the "peer regions", on issues of regional importance. This report documents where the St. Louis region stands among its peers on homicide rates. Additional WWS tables on topics of importance to this conversation are available at ewgateway.org/wws.

Some of the key points from this report are:

- Murder rates in St. Louis are higher than those in most peer regions.
- There was a sharp increase in the number of homicides in the St. Louis region since 2013. A similar increase was seen in some, but not all, of the peer metropolitan regions.
- Half of homicide victims in the St. Louis region are black males between the ages of 15 and 34. Among the peer regions, St. Louis has the highest black homicide rate.
- Over 90 percent of homicides in St. Louis are committed with firearms.
- Homicides are concentrated in areas of high poverty.

Data Sources

The main sources of data on homicides are the FBI Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program and mortality statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Each source has strengths and weaknesses.

The UCR program compiles data reported from law enforcement agencies across the country. Although laws in both Missouri and Illinois require agencies to report, a small percentage of forces fail do so, usually smaller ones. For this reason, it is important to assess the number of reporting agencies before compiling data to the county level. Due to reporting issues, statistics at the MSA level are not available for all of the peer regions for any given year.

UCR data are available at the MSA level for most metropolitan regions through 2017 and for many central cities through 2018. UCR data reports the number of homicides by the place of occurrence.

Because UCR data are sometimes not available for MSAs or counties, an alternative source of information is the Underlying Cause of Death file produced by the CDC. CDC data are currently only available through 2017. Information is suppressed for counties with fewer than 10 homicides, although homicide counts are available for aggregations of counties for which the sum of homicides is 10 or more. In addition to raw counts, CDC data offers information on characteristics of victims, as well as on weapons used to commit homicides. Whereas UCR data reports homicides by place of occurrence, CDC data reports homicides by place of residence for the victim. The source used by the CDC is death certificates.

1 See sources: Missouri State Highway Patrol and Illinois State Police.
2 See sources: Missouri State Highway Patrol and St. Louis Post-Dispatch.
3 *Where We Stand* tracks the St. Louis region among the 50 most populous Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), which are geographic entities delineated by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). MSAs are areas with "at least one urbanized area of 50,000 or more population, plus adjacent territory that has a high degree of social and economic integration with the core as measured by commuting ties."

Homicide Rates for the Peer Regions

Tables 1 and 2 provide the homicide rates for the peer regions from the two national sources discussed on Page 1.

Although there are some differences between the sources, there is a high correlation between the two sets of rankings. Both show that St. Louis had one of the highest homicide rates among the peer regions in 2017. Also, most of the Midwest peer regions have rates that are larger than that of the nation as a whole.

The murder rate per 100,000 in St. Louis was 12.6, well above the national average of 5.3.

Table 1 shows murder rates using UCR data at the MSA level. In 2017, St. Louis ranked 4th out of the 46 peer regions for which UCR data were reported. Note that four of the 50 MSAs are not reported in these data: Birmingham, Kansas City, Raleigh, and Richmond. The murder rate per 100,000 in St. Louis was 12.6, well above the national average of 5.3.

Table 2 shows homicide rates at the MSA level as reported by the CDC. The rankings are similar. St. Louis ranked 5th with a homicide rate of 13.6 deaths per 100,000 population. Birmingham ranked higher than St. Louis in the CDC data, but is absent from the UCR data. If Birmingham is omitted from the CDC data, then the rankings of the top four MSAs are identical.

The peer regions that share states with St. Louis, Chicago and Kansas City, have lower rates than St. Louis but also have rates that are substantially higher than the national average. Chicago ranks 7th based on the UCR data and 10th based on the CDC data. Kansas City was omitted from the UCR data but, based on the CDC data, ranks just behind St. Louis with a rate of 11.0.

Table 1

Murder Rate

Per 100,000 population, 2017

1	**New Orleans**	**17.1**
2	Memphis	16.3
3	Baltimore	14.7
4	**St. Louis**	**12.6**
5	Las Vegas	10.8
6	Louisville	9.5
7	Chicago	9.4
8	Indianapolis	8.3
9	Jacksonville	8.2
10	Philadelphia	8.1
11	Columbus	7.9
11	Detroit	7.9
11	Milwaukee	7.9
11	Virginia Beach	7.9
15	Nashville	7.8
16	Oklahoma City	7.6
17	Cleveland	7.2
18	Atlanta	6.7
19	Houston	6.4
19	San Antonio	6.4
21	Miami	6.1
22	Phoenix	5.7
23	Pittsburgh	5.4
24	Charlotte	5.3
United States		**5.3**
25	Dallas	5.2
26	Cincinnati	5.1
27	Orlando	5.0
28	Los Angeles	4.8
29	Denver	4.6
29	Riverside	4.6
31	Washington, D.C.	4.5
32	Buffalo	4.3
32	Sacramento	4.3
34	San Francisco	4.2
35	Hartford	3.9
36	Salt Lake City	3.7
37	Tampa	3.6
38	Seattle	3.0
39	New York	2.8
40	Boston	2.6
40	Minneapolis	2.6
40	Portland	2.6
43	Austin	2.5
44	San Diego	2.4
44	San Jose	2.4
46	**Providence**	**2.0**

Source: FBI, Uniform Crime Reports (Tables 1, 6)

Table 2

Homicides

Per 100,000 population, 2017

1	**New Orleans**	**18.3**
2	Memphis	17.7
3	Birmingham	16.6
4	Baltimore	15.0
5	**St. Louis**	**13.6**
6	Jacksonville	11.0
6	Kansas City	11.0
8	Richmond	10.7
9	Louisville	10.6
10	Chicago	10.4
11	Cleveland	9.8
12	Indianapolis	9.3
13	Milwaukee	8.8
14	Oklahoma City	8.6
15	Philadelphia	8.5
15	San Antonio	8.5
17	Las Vegas	8.4
18	Detroit	8.3
19	Nashville	8.1
20	Columbus	8.0
21	Atlanta	7.7
22	Virginia Beach	7.4
23	Houston	7.3
24	Miami	6.8
25	Charlotte	6.2
25	Phoenix	6.2
United States		**6.0**
27	Cincinnati	5.9
27	Pittsburgh	5.9
29	Orlando	5.8
30	Dallas	5.7
31	Riverside	5.5
32	Los Angeles	5.2
32	Washington, D.C.	5.2
34	Sacramento	5.0
35	Tampa	4.9
36	Denver	4.8
37	Buffalo	4.7
37	San Francisco	4.7
39	Hartford	3.6
40	Salt Lake City	3.3
41	Seattle	3.2
42	New York	3.1
42	Raleigh	3.1
44	Portland	2.9
45	Minneapolis	2.8
46	San Jose	2.7
47	Austin	2.6
48	Boston	2.5
48	San Diego	2.5
50	**Providence**	**2.0**

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

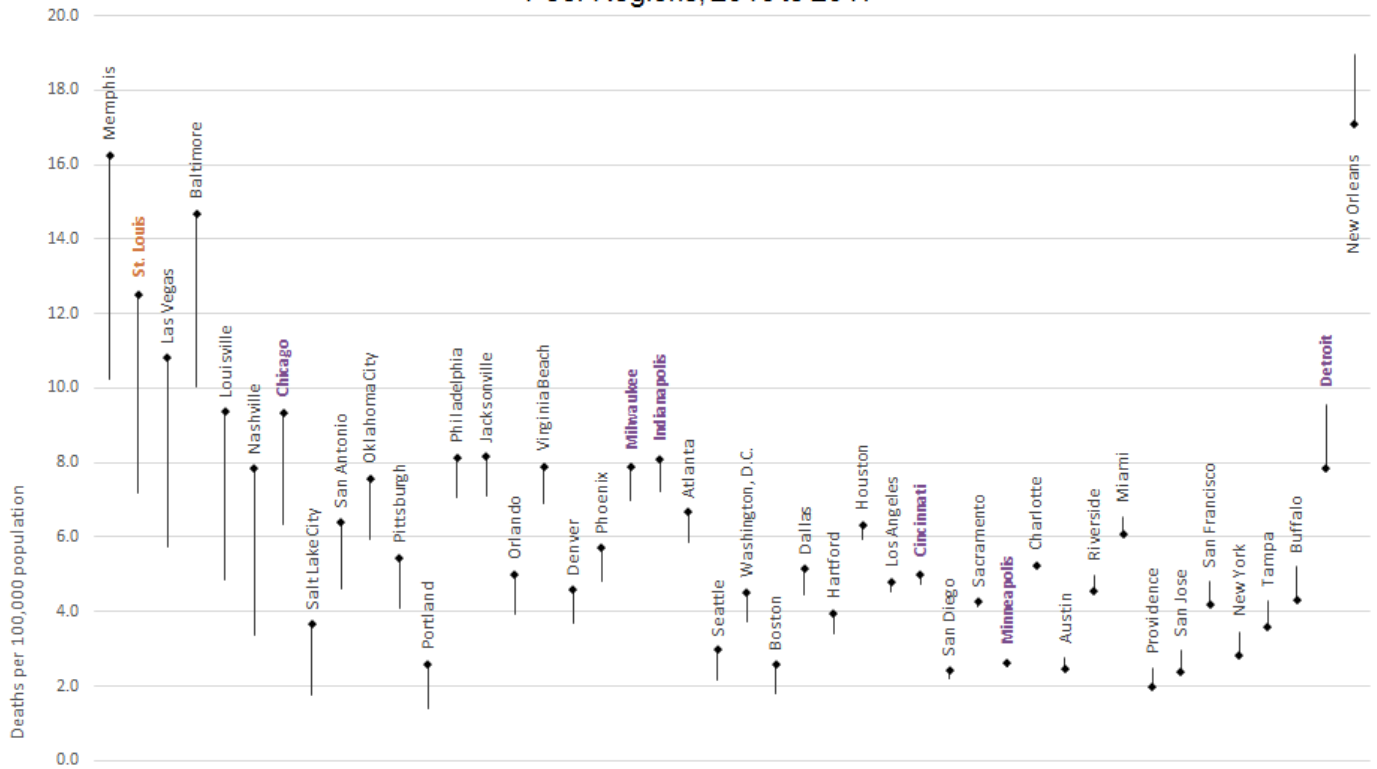
MSA Homicide Trends

Table 3 shows change in homicide rates according to the CDC from 2013 to 2017. St. Louis ranks 2nd on this list, trailing only Birmingham.

Figure 1 shows the change in MSA homicide rates per 100,000 people from 2013 to 2017 according to the FBI data. The beginning of each arrow shows the homicide rate in 2013, while the point of the arrow shows the rate in 2017. Regions are ranked from left to right, with the greatest increases on the left, and the greatest decreases on the right. Thus, St. Louis went from 7.2 to 12.5 deaths per 100,000 during this time period. Memphis had a higher homicide rate than St. Louis in both 2013 and 2017, as well as a larger increase. Other regions with large increases in this time period include Las Vegas, Baltimore, and Louisville.

Regions with decreasing homicide rates are on the right side of the graph. New Orleans had the biggest decrease, although it still had the highest murder rate among the peer regions. Detroit had the second largest decrease. In 2013, the murder rate in Detroit was higher than that of St. Louis. By 2017, the homicide rate in Detroit was lower than that of St. Louis.

Figure 1: Change in MSA Murder Rates
Deaths per 100,000 population
Peer Regions, 2013 to 2017



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Report

Table 3

Change in Homicides

Point difference in homicide rate, 2013-2017

1	**Birmingham**	**6.7**
2	**St. Louis**	**5.5**
3	Louisville	4.7
4	Baltimore	4.5
5	Richmond	4.3
6	Memphis	4.0
6	Nashville	4.0
8	Chicago	3.2
9	Kansas City	3.0
9	San Antonio	3.0
11	Las Vegas	2.9
12	Cleveland	2.7
13	Jacksonville	2.3
14	Columbus	1.9
15	Atlanta	1.6
16	Oklahoma City	1.5
17	Salt Lake City	1.5
18	Milwaukee	1.3
19	Orlando	1.2
19	Philadelphia	1.2
21	Pittsburgh	1.1
21	Washington, D.C.	1.1
23	Portland	1.0
24	Indianapolis	0.9
United States		**0.9**
25	Denver	0.9
26	Virginia Beach	0.8
27	Sacramento	0.8
28	Cincinnati	0.7
28	Phoenix	0.7
30	Seattle	0.6
31	Boston	0.4
31	Hartford	0.4
33	Dallas	0.3
33	Houston	0.3
33	Los Angeles	0.3
36	Charlotte	0.2
37	Austin	0.1
38	Minneapolis	0.0
39	San Francisco	-0.1
39	Tampa	-0.1
41	Raleigh	-0.1
42	Riverside	-0.2
43	San Diego	-0.3
44	San Jose	-0.4
45	Miami	-0.4
46	New York	-0.6
47	Buffalo	-0.8
47	Providence	-0.8
49	New Orleans	-1.6
50	**Detroit**	**-1.8**

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

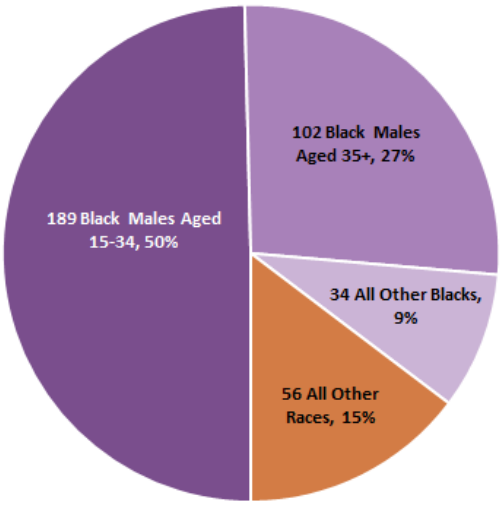
African Americans nationwide are disproportionately impacted by violence, but in St. Louis the problem is particularly pronounced. Table 4 shows that the St. Louis MSA ranks 1st among the 44 peer regions for which data are available on homicide rates for non-Hispanic blacks.

Table 5 shows that the white homicide rate in St. Louis is actually lower than the national average. The disparity between black and white homicide rates is the highest among the peer regions.

The disparity between black and white homicide rates is the highest among the peer regions.

Half of all homicide victims in the St. Louis MSA are black males between 15 and 34 years of age (see Figure 2). An additional 27 percent are black males 35 years old or older. About 9 percent of homicide victims are black females and children under the age of 15, and just 15 percent of homicide victims are members of other races.

Figure 2: Homicide Victims by Race and Age Group
St. Louis MSA, 2017



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Table 4
Non-Hispanic Black Homicides

Per 100,000 non-Hispanic black people, 2017

1	St. Louis	60.9
2	Kansas City	49.6
3	Birmingham	45.5
4	Chicago	45.0
5	Baltimore	42.5
6	Milwaukee	41.1
7	New Orleans	40.9
7	Pittsburgh	40.9
9	Louisville	40.8
10	Indianapolis	37.2
11	Cleveland	35.7
12	Columbus	31.2
13	Jacksonville	31.1
13	Oklahoma City	31.1
15	Memphis	30.6
16	Philadelphia	29.8
17	Detroit	29.7
18	Cincinnati	28.6
19	Nashville	28.4
20	Richmond	28.0
21	San Francisco	27.6
22	Las Vegas	27.0
23	Buffalo	25.2
United States		23.2
24	Sacramento	22.9
25	Houston	21.3
26	Miami	20.4
27	Los Angeles	20.1
28	San Antonio	19.6
29	Riverside	18.5
30	Phoenix	18.3
31	Charlotte	18.2
32	Tampa	18.0
33	Virginia Beach	17.8
34	Dallas	17.1
35	Denver	16.4
36	Atlanta	16.3
37	Orlando	16.1
38	Hartford	16.0
39	Minneapolis	15.6
40	Seattle	14.7
41	Washington, D.C.	14.1
42	Boston	11.3
43	New York	10.8
44	**Raleigh**	**7.7**

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Table 5
Non-Hispanic White Homicides

Per 100,000 non-Hispanic white people, 2017

1	**San Antonio**	**7.4**
2	Las Vegas	5.7
3	Jacksonville	5.4
4	Oklahoma City	4.8
5	Louisville	4.7
5	Memphis	4.7
7	New Orleans	4.4
8	Birmingham	4.2
8	Orlando	4.2
10	Kansas City	4.0
11	Indianapolis	3.9
11	Nashville	3.9
13	Phoenix	3.8
14	Riverside	3.5
15	Houston	3.4
16	Cleveland	3.1
16	Dallas	3.1
16	Salt Lake City	3.1
16	Tampa	3.1
20	Columbus	3.0
United States		2.9
21	Baltimore	2.8
21	Richmond	2.8
21	Sacramento	2.8
24	Miami	2.7
25	Atlanta	2.6
25	Cincinnati	2.6
25	Denver	2.6
25	Portland	2.6
29	Pittsburgh	2.4
29	St. Louis	2.4
31	Charlotte	2.2
31	Los Angeles	2.2
31	Virginia Beach	2.2
34	San Francisco	2.1
35	San Diego	2.0
36	Austin	1.9
36	Detroit	1.9
38	Chicago	1.8
38	Philadelphia	1.8
38	Seattle	1.8
41	Minneapolis	1.4
42	Washington, D.C.	1.3
43	Boston	1.2
44	**New York**	**0.9**

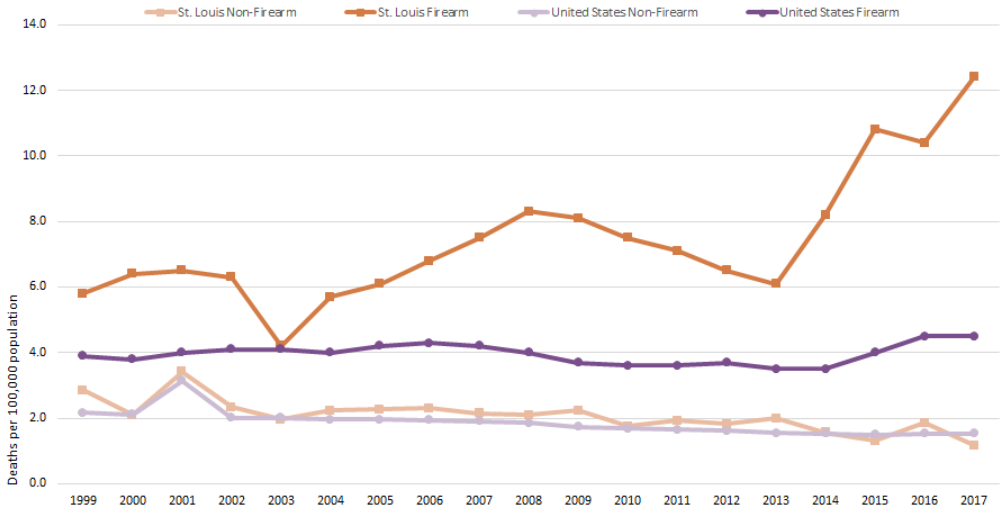
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Over 90 percent of homicides in St. Louis in 2017 were committed with the use of firearms. Table 6 shows that no other peer region had a higher percentage of homicides that were committed with firearms. The percentage was lower for the United States as a whole, 74.5 percent. Like St. Louis, the percentage of firearm-related homicides was higher than that of the nation in most of the Midwest peer regions.

The rate of firearm-related homicides increased sharply in St. Louis after 2013, while nationally, the rate of homicides committed with a firearm remained relatively flat.

Figure 3 shows firearm-related and non-firearm-related homicide rates in the St. Louis MSA and the United States for 1999 to 2017. The rate of firearm-related homicides increased sharply in St. Louis after 2013, while nationally, the rate of homicides committed with a firearm remained relatively flat. Homicides committed by means other than a firearm remained about the same or declined over this time period.

Figure 3: Non-Firearm Homicides and Firearm Homicides
Deaths per 100,000 population
St. Louis MSA and United States, 1999 to 2017



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Table 6
Firearm Homicides

Percent of all homicides, 2017

1	St. Louis	91.3
2	Memphis	89.1
3	Virginia Beach	89.0
4	Indianapolis	87.3
5	Chicago	86.5
6	Milwaukee	86.3
7	Kansas City	85.9
8	Birmingham	85.3
9	New Orleans	84.5
10	Nashville	83.2
11	Cincinnati	82.9
12	Richmond	82.7
13	Columbus	82.5
14	Baltimore	82.4
15	Atlanta	82.1
16	Louisville	81.8
17	Pittsburgh	80.3
18	Miami	79.7
19	Philadelphia	79.3
20	Dallas	79.0
21	Detroit	78.9
22	Charlotte	78.3
23	Cleveland	78.2
24	Jacksonville	78.2
25	Houston	78.1
26	Buffalo	77.4
27	San Antonio	77.1
28	Orlando	76.7
29	San Francisco	75.6
United States		74.5
30	Phoenix	73.8
31	Los Angeles	73.7
32	Riverside	71.3
33	Oklahoma City	70.6
34	Austin	70.4
35	Salt Lake City	70.0
36	Hartford	69.8
37	Tampa	69.1
38	Las Vegas	68.8
39	Washington, D.C.	67.3
40	Seattle	66.7
41	Raleigh	65.9
42	Boston	65.0
43	Minneapolis	64.4
44	Sacramento	62.4
45	New York	61.0
46	Denver	60.7
47	Portland	57.1
48	San Jose	54.7
49	San Diego	52.9
50	**Providence**	**51.5**

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Figure 4 displays murders committed in 2018 by place of occurrence, as reported by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, overlaid with poverty rate data from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey. Census tracts are shaded purple based on the poverty rate. Areas with the lowest poverty rate are indicated by lighter shades and the highest poverty areas indicated by darker shades of purple. It is clear that a disproportionate number of homicides occur in high-poverty neighborhoods.

Central City Comparison

Visit ewgateway.org/wws for an appendix to this report that shows how the city of St. Louis compares to other large central cities. A disproportionate number of homicides occur in U.S. central cities. A recent increase in homicides were seen in the cities of St. Louis, Kansas City, Memphis, and Chicago while Detroit saw a decline in recent years.

This data was compiled by the Marron Institute, New York University based on UCR data and is available at AmericanViolence.org.

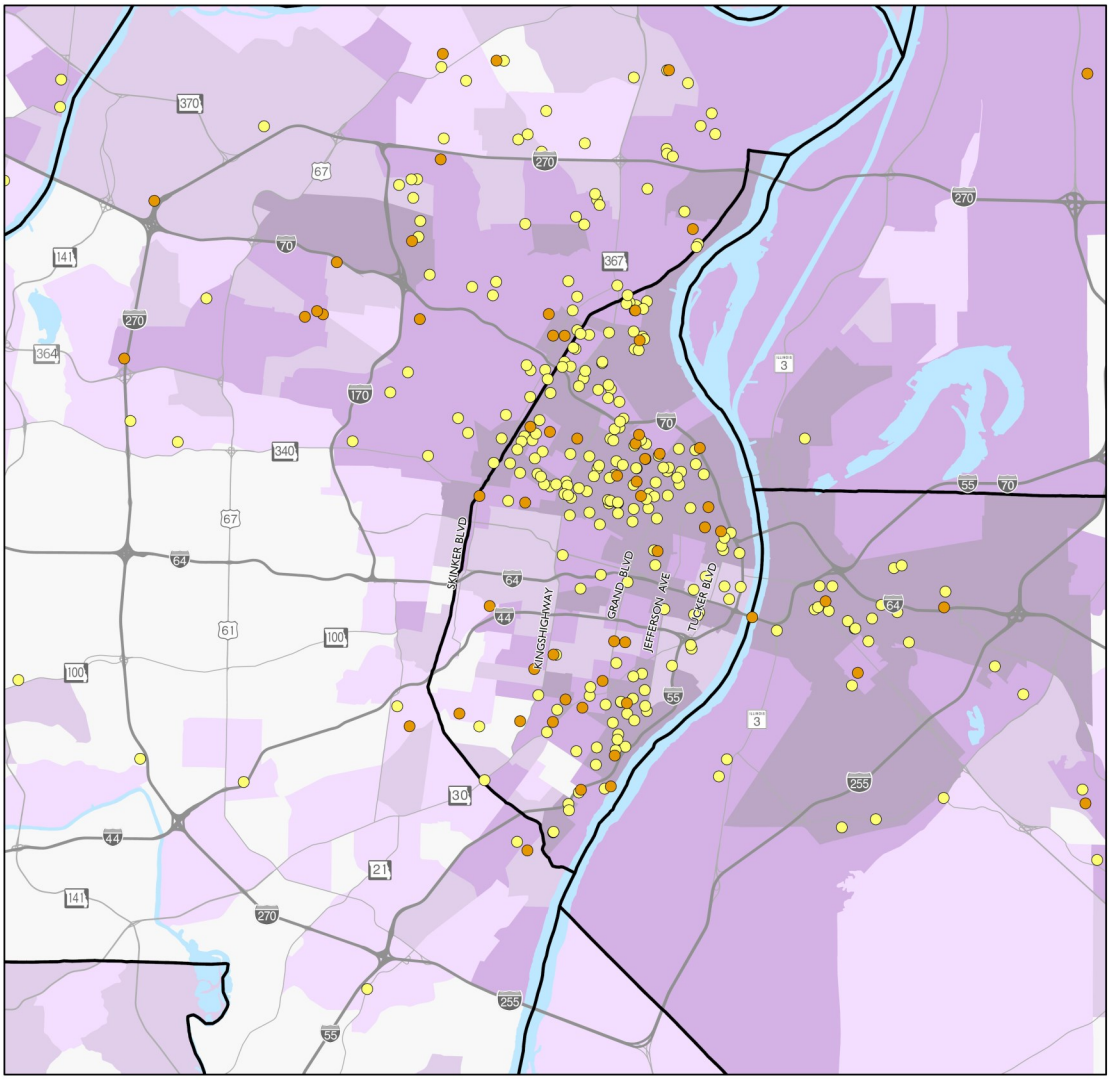


Figure 4
Poverty Rate and Homicides

St. Louis Metropolitan Area, 2018

Percent of Population Living in Poverty

- Over 30 Percent
- 15 to 30 Percent
- 10 to 15 Percent
- 5 to 10 Percent
- 0 to 5 Percent

Other Map Items

- 1 Dot = 1 Homicide (Firearm Related)
- 1 Dot = 1 Homicide (Other)
- Interstate Highway
- Major Road
- County Boundary
- River / Lake

Poverty data is depicted by 2010 Census tracts. Tract boundaries are not shown. Homicide locations are approximate.

0 1 2 Miles

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Estimates, 2013-2017; St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 2019

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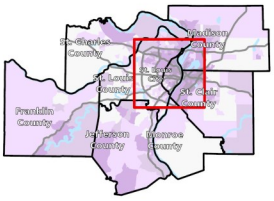


County Trends

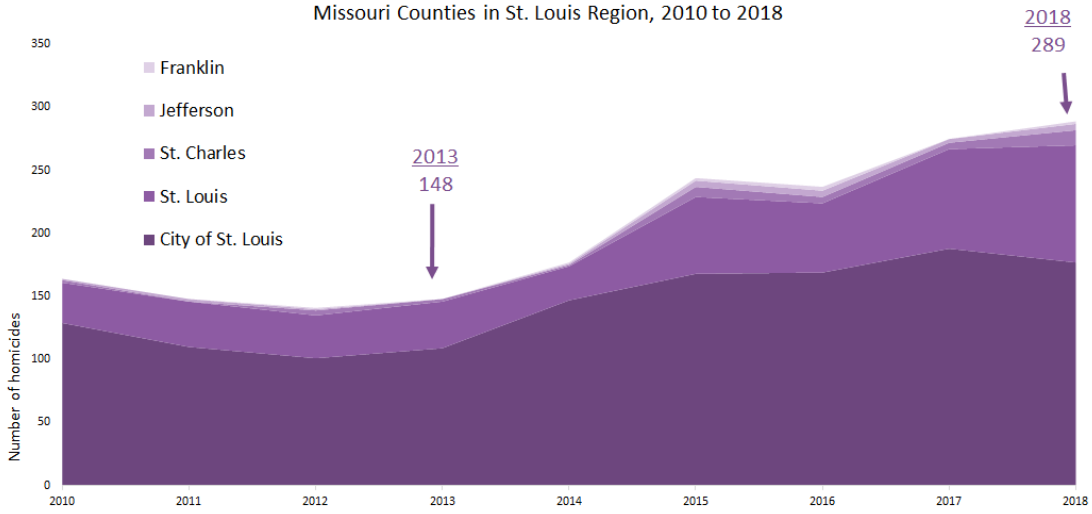
The following description of trends in the St. Louis region discusses the Missouri and Illinois portions of the region separately. For the Missouri counties, UCR coverage is fairly complete, and is used to describe trends. In the Illinois counties, some municipalities were absent for certain years in the UCR database. For this reason, CDC data is used to characterize trends in the counties of Madison, Monroe, and St. Clair.

Figure 5 shows homicide counts for the five counties in the Missouri portion of the St. Louis region from 2010 through 2018. The darkest color represents the city of St. Louis, and the next darkest represents St. Louis County. Over 90 percent of homicides in the Missouri portion of the region occurred in these two jurisdictions. The total shaded area represents the sum of the five counties.

Notable is a sharp increase in homicides after 2013. The total number of homicides in the Missouri counties of the St. Louis region was 148 in 2013. The total was nearly double that (289) in 2018. From 2017 to 2018, the number of homicides decreased in the city of St. Louis, however this decline was offset by an increase in St. Louis County and resulted in an overall increase for the five counties from 275 to 289.

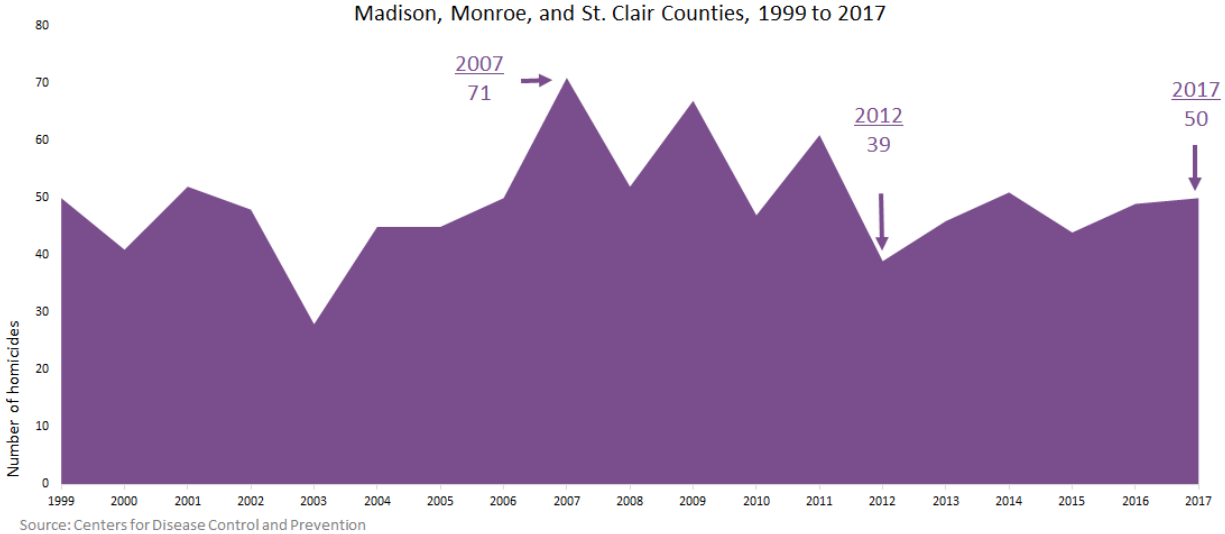
Figure 6 shows combined homicides for the Illinois counties of Madison, Monroe, and St. Clair for the years 1999 through 2017. Due to CDC data suppression rules, it is only possible to report the aggregate total for these three counties, rather than disaggregated estimates for each county. Homicides in these counties peaked in 2007 with 71 deaths. Over this time period, the number of homicides in the three counties has been more volatile than in the Missouri portion of the region and does not show a clear trend. The number of homicides each year from 2014 to 2017 was about the same or slightly higher than in 2013.

Figure 5: Homicides
Missouri Counties in St. Louis Region, 2010 to 2018



Source: Missouri Highway Patrol, Uniform Crime Reporting Website

Figure 6: Homicides
Madison, Monroe, and St. Clair Counties, 1999 to 2017



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Department of Justice Diagnostic Analysis

In 2017, the Department of Justice (DOJ) produced a diagnostic analysis of violence in the city of St. Louis. The study was undertaken at the request of the city of St. Louis as part of the technical assistance provided by the Office of Justice at the DOJ. The purpose of the diagnostic study was to "assess the scope of youth-related gun violence" in St. Louis, identify evidence-based solutions, and develop a response strategy.

The assessment included an analysis of data; interviews of representatives from law enforcement, local governments, schools, courts, and community organizations; an assessment of current programs and services in the city; and a focused analysis at the neighborhood level. The DOJ report had several findings, including:

- Homicides and gun assaults are concentrated in areas of the city with high rates of poverty, unemployment, and vacancy.
- Young black males are the suspects and victims in a majority of gun violence.
- Clearance rates of gun crimes are lower in St. Louis than on average for the nation.

The DOJ described several strengths in the current system and community, including the following:

- The St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission, convened by Washington University and the United Way has over 130 members who come together to connect and align organizations that are addressing gun violence.
- The St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department regularly reviews data, builds community relationships, and works with other agencies to foster relationships and share information and resources.

The DOJ also identified key challenges, grouped into four categories: community barriers, gaps in law enforcement, gaps in services, and gaps in gun violence strategies. Key challenges included the following: racial and economic segregation, low levels of trust in law enforcement, and lack of intervention services.

Finally, the DOJ identified programs and policies that have been found to be effective in other communities and that are specific to the factors identified as contributing to violence in the city of St. Louis. Based on this analysis, the DOJ identified strategies for the city of St. Louis, some of which are already being pursued by the city and other organizations in the region. Two examples are: (1) identify an organization to lead a strategic approach to addressing violence, which has been taken on by the St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission[4] and (2) implementing the Cure Violence program, which several partners are working to bring to the area, including the city of St. Louis.

4 For more on the St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission, see https://www.stlareavpc.org/.

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