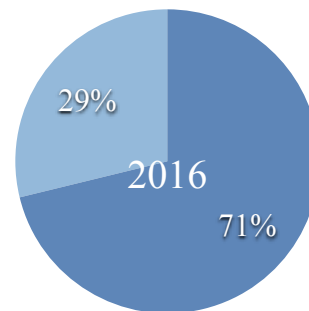# Homicide in Louisville in 2016: An Overview

Jordan Harris

In 2016, Louisville set an all time record for homicides. As others have noted, this has not been a gradual increase, but has instead been a dramatic spike over the course of two years. With the city on pace to eclipse this total again in 2017, this overview is an effort to unpack and illustrate the homicide total from a year ago and be coupled with the LIVE Initiative - our policy recommendation directed at reducing homicides. This information is a record of our analysis of publicly available crime data, supplied by the Louisville Metro Police Department (LMPD).

Inside the Watterson Expressway[i]

There is an extent to which Louisville's numbers have been insulated by the relatively large size of the city, while the overwhelming majority of homicides have actually taken place "inside the Watterson Expressway." In 2016, 71.18% (84 of 118) of all homicides investigated by LMPD took place in zip codes that are either wholly or partially inside the Watterson.[ii] Approximately 56% of all crime investigated by LMPD took place in this area, showing a disproportionate concentration of

Inside of I-264 ● Outside of I-264

homicides.[iii] This is a lower percentage of overall homicides than 2015, when 81.25% (65 of 80) of all murders investigated by LMPD took place inside the analyzed area, but an overall increase from 65 to 84 (29.2%)

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[i] For our purpose, the Western barrier of the area analyzed is the Ohio River, rather than i-265 itself. The interstate is considered as the Southern and Eastern border of the analyzed area, but would make an unnatural cut off on Louisville's West End. The river, by contrast, is a more natural barrier.

[ii] It is worth noting, that the interstate runs through some zip codes, such as 40211(Parkland and Shawnee Neighborhood), which extends to the Ohio River, however the zip code in its entirety is, for our purpose, considered "inside the Watterson Expressway."

[iii] Louisville is 398 square miles in total, with on 53.6 square miles, or 13%, falling inside the Watterson. Our analyzed area, which extends west from I-264 to the Ohio River includes an additional 10.7 square miles making the total area analyzed 64.3 square miles, or 16.2% of the city.

year over year. Using a conservative estimate of a population inside the Watterson Expressway is just under 275,000 residents, meaning that with 84 total murders in 2016, this area had a murder rate of 30.5 per 100,000.[iv] If considered in isolation, this would be the 8th most dangerous major city in America, edging out Chicago, Illinois, which has a murder rate of 27.7 per 100,000.

In total, 16 zipcodes are wholly or partially inside of the Watterson, with 15 considered as part of our analysis.[v] The majority of homicides in 2016 took place in five individual zip codes (listed in order of total); 40211, 40203, 40210, 40212, and 40215. These five areas accounted for just over 77% (65 of 84) of the murders inside the Watterson Expressway, 55% of murders investigated by LMPD (65 of 118), and 52.4% (65 of 124) of all murders in Jefferson County. Four of these five zip codes had an increase in homicides in 2016, helping to push the city-wide total to an all-time high.

- The 40211 zip code, which includes the Parkland and Shawnee neighborhoods, accounted for the highest numbers of homicides overall with 20. This area saw a 67% year over year increase, increasing from 12 homicides in 2015, to 20 in 2016.

- The 40203 zip code, which makes up part of Old Louisville and stretches around the Central Business District into Portland, had the second highest number of murders overall with 16. This is a 14.3% increase from 2015, when this area experienced had 14 homicides investigated by LMPD. Even aside from homicides, this area has the highest number of total crimes in the city (6,746 in 2016), and the highest number per

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iv Population estimate based on census projections and 2015 University of Louisville study on growth projection in Louisville. Because out-migration is higher than anticipated, the population of the measured area may be closer to 250,000, which would be a murder rate of 33.6 per 100,000, higher than Memphis.
v Because only a tiny portion of 40214 falls within the Watterson, it was not considered as part of our analysis. Population for this portion is however taken into consideration for measuring murder rate.

resident (0.3 crimes per resident) of any area.[vi] This area has a murder rate of 76.36 per 100,000, making it the second highest murder rate in the city of Louisville. With these factor combine, this area is arguably the most dangerous in the city.

- The deadliest area of Louisville is the 40210 zip code, which includes the Russell, California, and Park Hill neighborhoods. There were 13 homicides investigated by LMPD in this zip code, giving it the third most overall. This was an increase from the 2015 total of 8, a 62.5% increase. The murder rate in this area though, is a city-high at 85.43 per 100,000.

- The 40215 zip code experienced seven murders in 2016, up from five the previous year. Because of its sizable population, the area had a murder rate only slightly higher (33.5) than the average for inside the Watterson, but more than double the city-wide rate of 16.5 per 100,000.

A Historic Spike

It is reasonable to say that Louisville has never experienced a homicide surge like the one that it is currently going through. This includes the tumultuous period of the 1970s, when crime increased nationwide. Before 2016, Louisville's highest numbers of homicides in a single year occurred in 1970, when 104 murders occurred, 1971, when 110 murder occurred (the previous record high), and 1976 when 103 murders occurred.

From 1980 through 2014, Louisville averaged approximately 52.8 murders per year. The high during that 35 year period was in 1996, when police investigated 75 murders. In 2015, LMPD investigated 80 murders, a 42% increase year over year and the highest

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[vi] Numbers for the Central Business District (40202) are excluded from this metric, despite having a higher rate of crime per resident. A significant number of people work in, or visit, this area, but relatively few live in it. This causes an inflation in these numbers, making it more appropriate to exclude them.
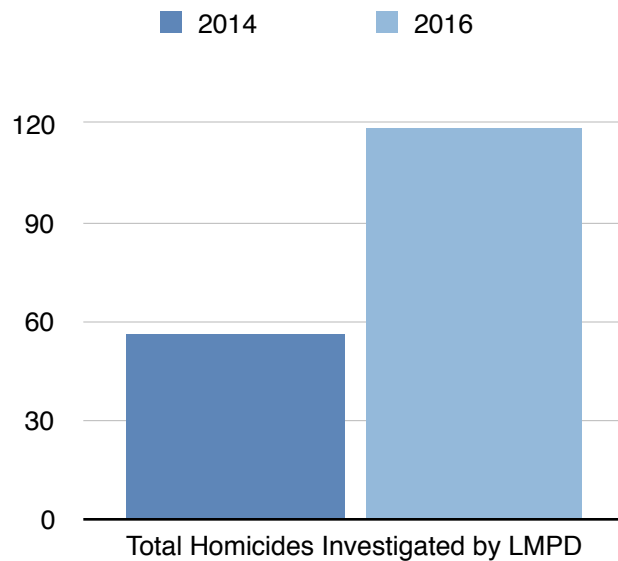
overall total since 1979. A similar leap occurred between 1969 and 1970 when the total number of murders increased from 76 to 104 a jump of 36%. A few years later, a more significant jump occurred from 1975 to 1976, with homicides rising to 103, from 74 the previous year. This increase of 39.1% was the highest year over year jump in record keeping before the increase from 50 to 75 in 1996, a 50% increase (the all-time high). Following the 1996 increase, homicides declined, eclipsing 60 only one time in the following decade.

A more important measure is to consider a two-year increase, which would help demonstrate a trend. Between 1969 and 1971 (the year with the all-time high prior to 2016), homicide increased from 76 to 110, a 44.7% shift, and the highest in Louisville's history prior to the 2014 to 2016 period. A similar increase occurred between 1966 and 1968, an increase from 35 to 63, or 44.4%.[vii] The jump from 56 LMPD homicide investigation in 2014 to 118 in 2016, a 110% increase, is by far the largest jump in Louisville's history.

Murder Rate in Comparable Size Metro Areas to Louisville

Comparing Louisville's data to other cities is not perfectly straightforward. By total area, Louisville is the 20th largest city in the United States. By metro population though, the city is only 44th. This allows for a unique

■ 2014   ■ 2016

Total Homicides Investigated by LMPD

120
90
60
30
0

vii Jefferson County Data

distribution of residents as compared to similar cities. It remains worthwhile to look at cities with similar size metro populations to Louisville, when considering the full extent of Louisville's homicide spike. The two US cities just larger than Louisville are Memphis, Tennessee and Raleigh, North Carolina. The two cities just smaller than Louisville are Richmond, Virginia and New Orleans, Louisiana. When looking at these cities, it is evident that similar sized cities are dealing with similar problems, with homicides increasing in each one between 2014 and 2016. What remains unclear, is why Louisville's spike, as a year over year increase, is dramatically higher than similar sized cities.

- *Memphis* has long been one of the most violent places in America. In 2016, Memphis experienced 228 homicides, an all

time high.[viii] The murder rate for the city (estimated population 655,770), was 32.5 per 100,000, settling at seventh highest nationally.[ix] The land area of Memphis is 320 square miles making it relatively similar in size to Louisville, with a slightly larger percentage of the population living in the city proper. Last year was the highest murder rate in Memphis since 1993. Though previously trending downward, Memphis is like Louisville in that a spike has taken place. Unlike Louisville, the spike occurred only in 2016, after murders actually decreased between 2014 and 2015. The size of the spike between 2014 and 2016 is significantly smaller for Memphis than the one Louisville has experienced.

- *Raleigh*, despite increases in population, the city decreased its number of murders from 34 in 2008, to only 8 in 2014, even while

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viii 19 of Memphis' murders were classified as justifiable homicides. See following footnote.
ix Homicides investigated as "justifiable" homicides are not included among FBI murder rates, causing this number to be lower than a simple calculation would otherwise yield.

other violent crimes stagnated or increased. Both Raleigh and Durham have experienced increases in homicides since 2014. In Durham County overall, homicides have increased from 22 in 2014, to 43 in 2016, a 95% increase. This increase is the closest to Louisville's dramatic 110% increase among similar sized cities.

- *Richmond* has had relative stability in the size of its population, but experienced historic homicide decreases in the late 1990s. The city's all time high came in 1994, with 160 homicides. Two decades later, the city had reduced this number by nearly 75%, with only 43 homicides in 2014. Much like the other similarly sized cities, Richmond has seen an increase in homicides, with 60 victims in 2016. Like Memphis, the city saw a decrease in homicide in 2015 (41), followed by a significant jump in 2016. The city's murder rate in 2016 was approximately 27.2 per 100,000, up from 19.5 per 100,000 a year earlier placing it among the most dangerous cities in America.

- *New Orleans*, like Memphis, has long been one of America's most violent cities, routinely registering a top five murder rate. The city registered a rate of 41.7 per 100,000 in 2015, and an even higher 44.5 per 100,000 in 2016. Prior to the upticks in those years, the city had experienced a period of decrease. In 2014, New Orleans had 150 homicides, down from 193 in 2012. In 2016, the city had 175 murders, the most since 2012, up from 164 in 2015. While these totals are nowhere near the highs set before Hurricane Katrina, it is worth noting that over 105,000 fewer residents live in the city today, than in 1994 when the all-time record of 424 homicides was set.

About the Author

Jordan is the Founder and Co-Executive Director of Pegasus Institute