

The Highest Rates of Gun Homicides Are in Rural Counties

CAP americanprogress.org/article/the-highest-rates-of-gun-homicides-are-in-rural-counties

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September 26, 2025



An AR-15 semi-automatic rifle is held in front of a U.S. flag in Mississippi on September 26, 2020.
(Getty/AFP/Chandan Khanna)

Since gun homicides in America [spiked in 2020](#) and [peaked in October 2021](#), much of the reporting related to gun violence has centered around the nation's big cities. Forgotten in this conversation is how rural America is similarly dealing with the crisis of gun violence. Gun violence anywhere is unacceptable—whether in our largest cities, suburbs, or smallest communities. And when [half of all shootings occur outside of large cities](#), focusing exclusively on individual cities comes at the expense of achieving meaningful and long-lasting safety for all Americans. Instead of politicizing crime and community violence, we must recognize that gun violence is a uniquely American public health crisis that harms every community, regardless of size or political leanings.



In 2022, the Center for American Progress released [an analysis of data](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showing that, on a per capita basis, rural counties have some of the highest rates of gun homicides in the country—and higher rates of gun homicides than U.S. counties containing major American cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Using CDC data through 2024, this new Center for American Progress analysis finds that from 2021 and 2024, rural counties made up the majority of counties with the highest rates of gun violence in the country.

A note on the data

The data used for this analysis are from the [“National Center for Health Statistics Mortality Data on CDC WONDER.”](#) Gun homicide and gun suicide data were calculated using the “Provisional Multiple Cause of Death Data” for 2021 through 2024. Data were aggregated by occurrence county and urbanization level using the [“2013 NCHS Urban-Rural Classification Scheme for Counties,”](#) which classifies counties—in order of most to least urban—as “large central metro,” “large fringe metro,” “medium metro,” “small metro,” “micropolitan,” and “noncore.” Following the precedent used by the [Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions](#), while micropolitan and noncore counties can contain nonrural population centers, for this analysis, counties with this designation are considered “rural.” Counties classified as either “medium metro” or “small metro” are considered as “small and medium metro.” Counties classified as either “large central metro” or “large fringe metro” are considered “large metro.”

Notably, due to the sensitive nature of the data, counties with less than 10 deaths in a single year are suppressed. For this reason, annualized gun homicide rates were calculated using multiple years of data.

Rural counties have some of the highest rates of gun homicides

- Between 2021 and 2024, the majority of U.S. counties with the highest annualized gun homicide rate were rural:
 - Eleven of the top 20 U.S. counties were rural, seven were large metro counties, and two were small or medium metro counties.
- In 2024, the U.S. county with the highest per capita firearm homicide rate in the United States was Holmes County, Mississippi, which is classified as “nonmetropolitan-noncore,” meaning it is in the [most rural category](#) of U.S. counties.
- St. Louis, Missouri, was the only large metro U.S. county in the top five U.S. counties in terms of firearm homicide rate in 2024. The other four counties were all rural:
 - **Holmes County, Mississippi:** 102.8 firearm homicides per 100,000 residents
 - **Coahoma County, Mississippi:** 74.6 firearm homicides per 100,000 residents
 - **Leflore County, Mississippi:** 65.0 firearm homicides per 100,000 residents
 - **Sunflower County, Mississippi:** 56.5 firearm homicides per 100,000 residents
- The average annualized gun homicide rate in rural U.S. counties was still lower than that of small and medium metro and large metro U.S. counties in 2024:
 - Across all rural counties, the gun homicide rate was 3.5 per 100,000 residents in 2024, while it was 5.1 per 100,000 residents in large metro counties and 4.5 per 100,000 residents in small and medium metro counties.

Many of America's largest cities have far fewer gun homicides than rural areas

Despite perceptions shaped by media coverage and political narratives, some of America's biggest cities, including [Chicago](#), [Los Angeles](#), and [New York](#), have lower rates of gun homicides than many rural counties:

- Los Angeles County had the 164th-highest gun homicide rate of any U.S. county in 2024 (4.46).
- The four counties that comprise New York City, with available data, had the following gun homicide rates in 2024:
 - **Bronx County (The Bronx):** 4.55 per 100,000 residents (161st)
 - **Kings County (Brooklyn):** 2.29 per 100,000 residents (221st)
 - **New York County (Manhattan):** 1.75 per 100,000 residents (235th)
 - **Queens County (Queens):** 1.25 per 100,000 residents (247th)
- Suffolk County, Massachusetts, which contains the city of Boston, had the 209th-highest gun homicide rate in the country (2.90).
- Cook County, Illinois, which primarily contains Chicago, ranked 54th of any U.S. county in terms of its gun homicide rate (12.68).

The majority of counties with high gun violence are in states with weak gun laws

- The U.S. counties with the highest rates of both gun homicides and gun suicides tend to be in [Southern states](#) and [states with weak gun laws](#).
- In 2024, all but one of the 10 U.S. counties with the highest gun homicide rates were located in a state that received an "F" grade for weak gun laws from the [Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence](#).
- A CAP analysis of all U.S. counties with available data finds that counties in states with the weakest gun laws experienced the highest rates of gun homicides in 2024:
 - The gun homicide rate in U.S. counties in "F" states was 7.28 per 100,000 residents.
 - In U.S. counties located in a state that received an "A" grade, the gun homicide rate was just 2.98 per 100,000 residents.
- Counties in the [Southeast](#) have the highest gun homicide rates in the United States: CAP's analysis of CDC data finds that Mississippi's homicide rate is more than twice that of Illinois; Alabama's is three times that of California; and Louisiana's is four and a half times that of New York.

Conclusion

The [unscientific and oft-repeated narrative around gun violence](#), which relies on fear and myths of urban crime and violence, ignores many of the communities that are experiencing the highest rates of violence. Although this analysis found that gun homicide rates remained higher in large metro areas than more rural communities in 2024, U.S. cities are experiencing [historic year-over-](#)

[year public safety gains](#) as they leverage federal, state, and local resources to [invest in evidence-based solutions](#), including focusing law enforcement efforts on solving the most serious crimes and investing in [community violence intervention programs](#).

Congress should provide additional funding to extend these same strategies to rural communities, while opposing the Trump administration's proposed drastic cuts to [federal law enforcement agencies](#) and violence prevention programs that are working to make communities safer. American families deserve public safety solutions that work for everyone.