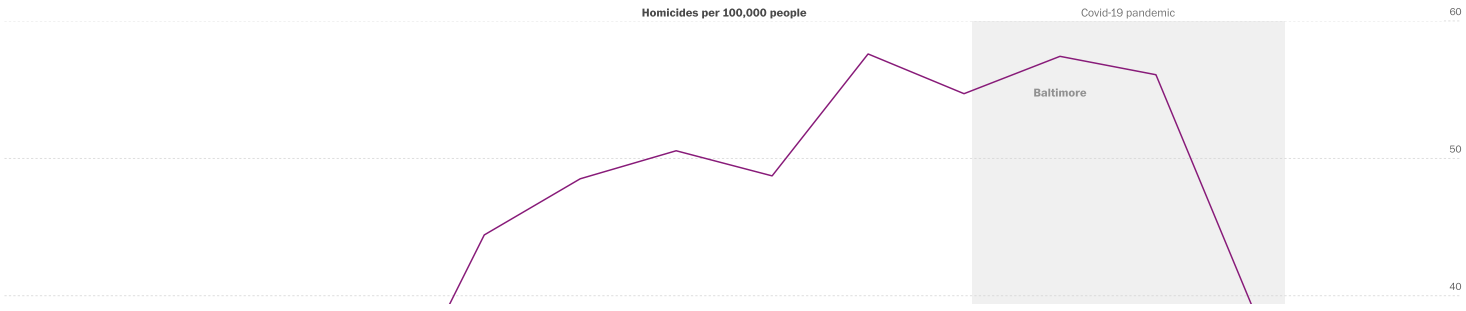
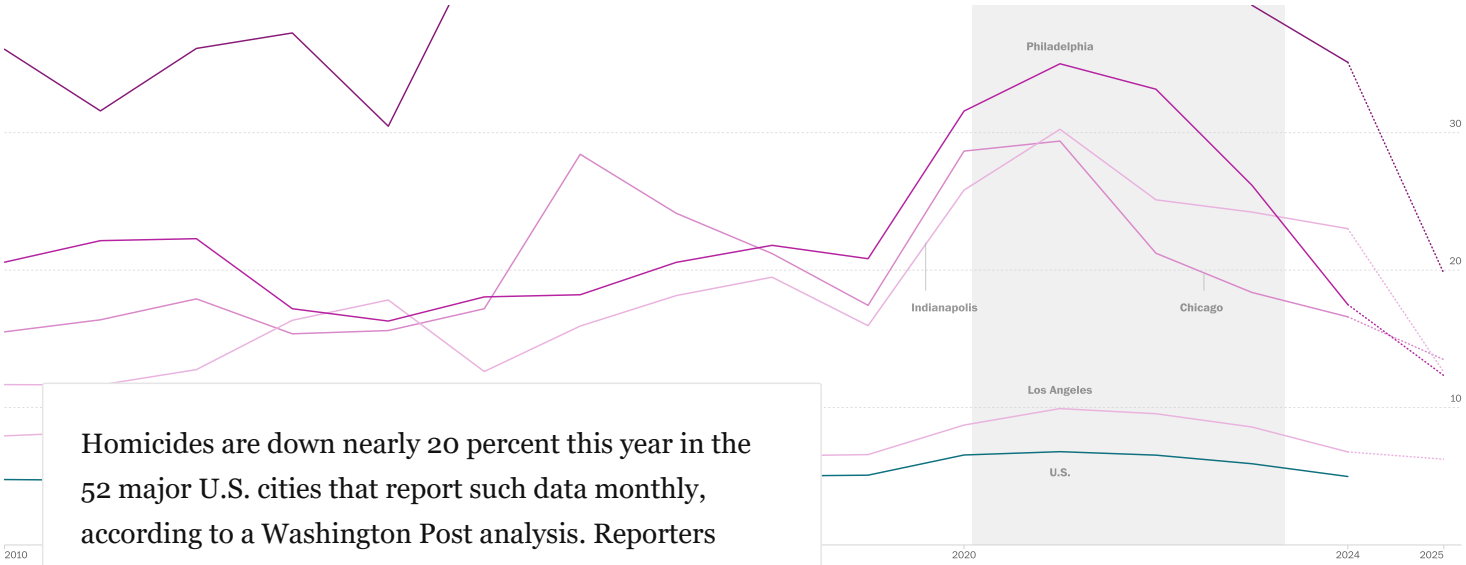
National

These five cities help explain why homicide rates are down across the U.S.

The rate of homicides has plummeted nationwide and, in 2025, is trending toward its lowest level in decades.

The steady decline has reversed the surge of slayings seen during the peak of the **covid-19 pandemic**.





Homicides are down nearly 20 percent this year in the 52 major U.S. cities that report such data monthly, according to a Washington Post analysis. Reporters visited five cities with some of the biggest declines since 2021.

By Reis Thebault, Katie Mettler, Tim Craig, Kim Bellware, Ben Brasch, John D. Harden and Carson TerBush

The Washington Post analyzed data from 52 large police departments and visited five U.S. cities to examine a sharp decline in homicide rates.

Yesterday at 6:00 a.m. EST

The United States remains a violent nation, more so than many other high-income countries, but the rate of homicides has fallen dramatically for nearly four straight years. There were 5,965 fewer killings in 2024 than in 2021, figures from the FBI show.

The drop-off spans both red and blue states and has unfolded even as police departments have struggled to fill vacancies and Americans have purchased guns at a staggering pace — a practice often linked to higher rates of violence.

It began during the administration of President Joe Biden and has persisted under President Donald Trump, who has continued to portray cities as lawless while deploying the National Guard and federal law enforcement agents to help local police combat crime.

Most criminologists say a combination of factors is driving the trend — pandemic-era investments in local violence intervention programs, the increased enforcement of tougher laws, reopened schools, demographic change and a rebound in employment.

“There is no one reason or no silver bullet for what makes crime go up and crime go down,” said Insha Rahman of the Vera Institute of Justice, a liberal research organization. “Anyone who tells you otherwise is lying.”

Explore homicide data

Crime data from 52 of the country's largest police departments show significant drops in homicides so far this year compared with the same period in previous years.

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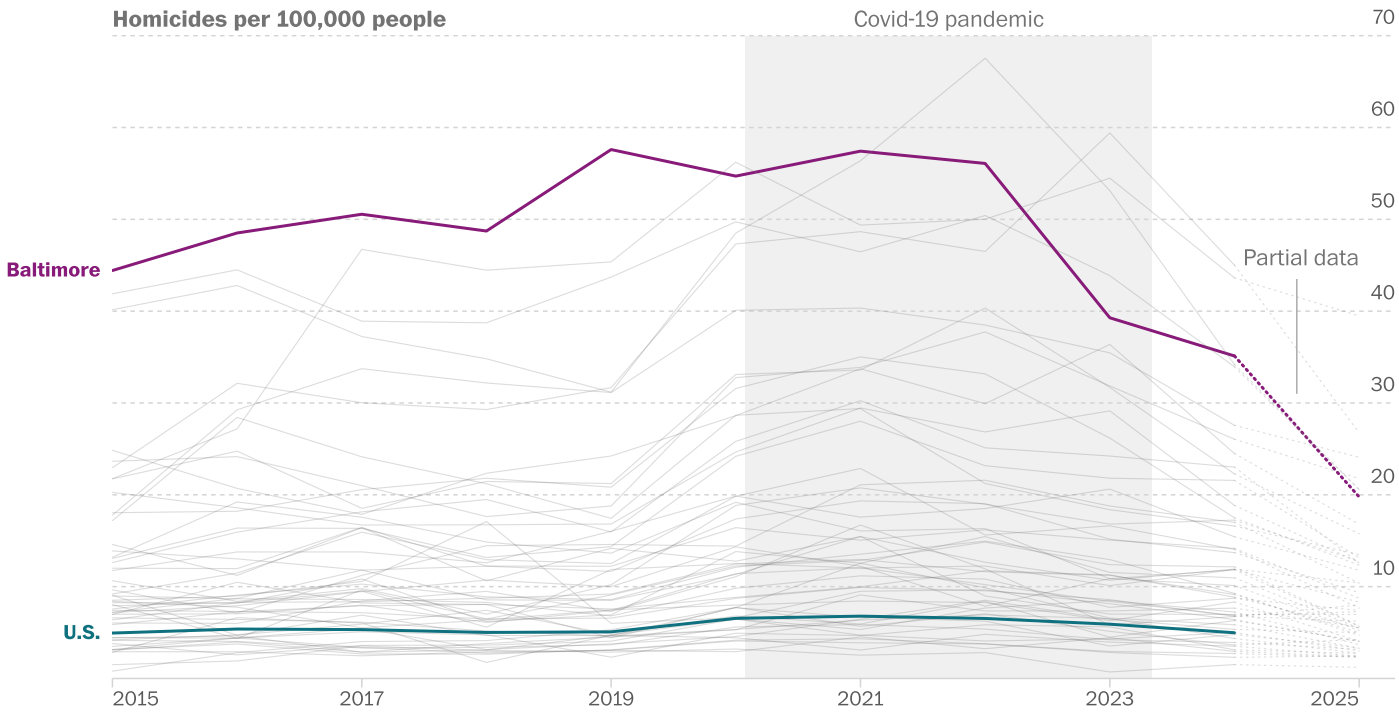
Search for a location



Note: City crime data is through Nov. 1, 2025. U.S average only available through 2024.

Source: FBI and individual police departments

In each city we visited — Baltimore, Philadelphia, Chicago, Indianapolis and Los Angeles — those involved in the daily grind of preventing homicides say the decreased violence has reshaped life in ways big and small, personal and profound.

An at-risk teen saving money from his new job instead of avenging a shooting. A once-dangerous park now brimming with freshly planted flowers and the sound of children at play. Fewer funeral meals to pay for and plan. Ex-gang members who used to be rivals working together to bring peace to their neighborhoods. (Click here to see how homicides have fallen sharply in D.C.)

Baltimore Philadelphia Chicago Indianapolis **Los Angeles**

BALTIMORE

fewer homicides so far this year compared with the same period in 2021

The large projection screen displayed the faces of dozens of people who Baltimore city leaders believed had potential.

Potential to succeed at school or a good job, to find purpose and a good life. Potential, as Mayor Brandon Scott often says, to be a resource for Baltimore to invest in rather than a problem to solve. But the city had also identified these people — mostly men, all connected to recent violence — as those with the highest potential to shoot or be shot next.

So on an afternoon in late October, this group of police, clergy, life coaches and street organizers studied the faces on the screen and gamed out how to invite them onto a better path.

A pastor said he'd spotted one of the men at a fried chicken joint but didn't want to spook him with a cold approach. A woman from the police department's victim services division said she'd recently delivered a care package to a different man, who'd been shot the week before and survived. A street organizer asked if there was anyone else who could help her with outreach on the city's east side.

"I'll find a way," she said.

This group has been responsible for carrying out Scott's Group Violence Reduction Strategy for three years —a period in which killings in Baltimore have fallen by more than half.

GVRS tries to contact people and offer support to ward off potential violence. (Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)

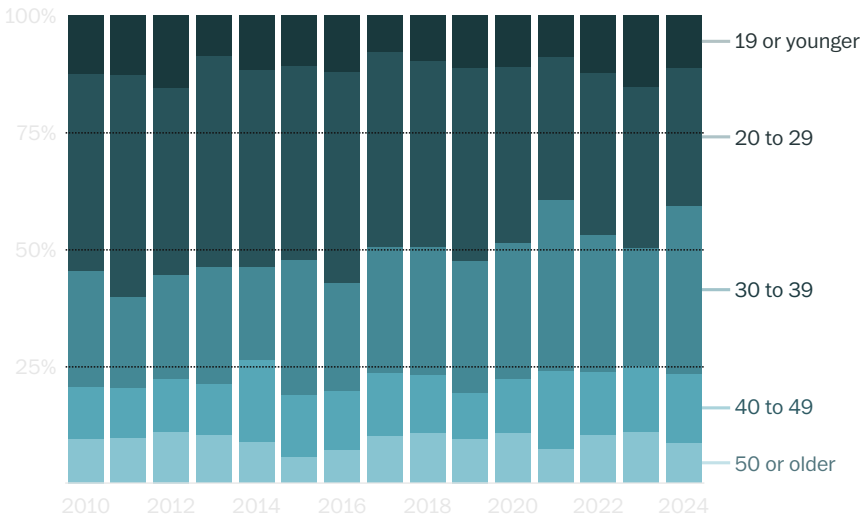
The citywide approach relies on a robust data and intelligence apparatus to identify those at high risk of being involved in violence, then deploys both law enforcement and social service support to try to keep that violence from happening.

The city's data analysis showed that three-quarters of shootings in Baltimore involved fewer than 2 percent of city residents. Many of those people had extensive criminal histories that included being hurt and hurting others. Much of the violence was linked to group retaliation. And many involved men in their 30s and 40s.

The city created programs to identify, track down and try to help that age demographic. At the same time, officials also made sure that state, local and federal law enforcement agencies investigated the groups they believed were responsible for most of Baltimore's violence.

Baltimore's homicide victims have shifted older over time

Teens and men in their 20s used to represent the majority of homicide victims in the city, but the share of victims over the age of 30 has grown.



Note: Cases with no known age are omitted

Source: FBI and Baltimore Police Department

Scott, who says he grew up "Black and poor" in West Baltimore, says he understands the obstacles and challenges many face in the city. He has written a letter that the violence-prevention teams take with them when they seek out those they believe have the potential to do better.

"As Mayor of Baltimore and as your neighbor," it reads, "I am committed to doing everything we can to keep you alive, safe and free."

He tells them he wants to help, but only if they turn away from violence. If they don't, he says, they should expect consequences — including criminal charges.

Community Partnership Manager Marvin McKenstry Jr. in Baltimore. (Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)

The day after their meeting in late October, the GVRS team members climbed into their cars with a fresh list of nine names, most of them men in their 30s. Their first three visits were dead ends. Then just before noon, the team climbed the porch steps of a rowhouse on a quiet street in West Baltimore.

Knock, knock, knock, knock.

A relative answered, then pulled out a cellphone and made a call. On the other end was their man. It was his birthday. And yes, he told the team, he'd like to learn more about their plan for him.

They left the mayor's letter for him to read when he got home.

PHILADELPHIA

50% ↘

fewer homicides so far this year compared with the same period in 2021

A judge was threatening to relocate a 15-year-old to a youth rehabilitation center after he violated his probation for stealing cars. The teenager was stewing over that possibility, and over who shot him in the back in April, as he walked to his West Philadelphia house.

Then James Aye, co-founder of YEAH Philly, heard from the teenager's public defender. The youth, who is being identified by only his last name, Scott, because he is a minor, needed help. Within days, Aye was at one of Scott's court hearings and persuaded a judge to release him into his care.

James Aye co-founded the youth program YEAH Philly in West Philadelphia. (Michelle Gustafson/For The Washington Post)

“We told the judge, ‘We are going to hold [Scott] accountable, and not the system,’” Aye recalled.

YEAH Philly, which was created in 2018, covers financial, legal, mental health and even some housing costs for teenagers and young adults at risk of being trapped in the criminal justice system. The program has served about 200 people in West or Southwest Philadelphia neighborhoods ravaged by generations of gun violence.

Participants get $100-a-week stipends and jobs at YEAH Philly’s West Philadelphia food market, a storefront location that offers free meat, vegetables and eggs to its impoverished neighbors. They have access to tutors and weekly lessons on automobile repair and building trades. Two YEAH Philly attorneys accompany participants to court hearings.

Scott, a YEAH Philly participant, at his job at the nonprofit's market. (Michelle Gustafson/For The Washington Post)

"We capture all the things they say they need," said Aye, who previously worked as a violence-prevention specialist at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. "If they say they need socks, socks is a need. If they need therapy, therapy is a need. If they just want to go somewhere and record music, that is a need."

“And then,” Aye added, “we wrap our arms around them and give them love.”

Officials continue to study the impact of the program, which is largely funded by private foundations. But preliminary data studied by Temple University’s department of criminal justice showed YEAH Philly participants had recidivism rates of about 9 percent, compared to state and national averages of about 30 percent. (The data exclude those arrested for new crimes before enrolling in the program.)

YEAH Philly’s success could be part of the reason that homicides are down by half in the city over the last four years.

Aye, with staff. The program helps cover financial, legal, mental health and some housing costs for at-risk young people. (Michelle Gustafson/For The Washington Post)

Between 2021 and 2024, the number of homicide victims under 18 in West Philadelphia dropped from nine annually to three. But so far this year, five youths have been killed in West Philadelphia, a sign that violence remains a problem.

After the court hearing in September, Aye drove Scott home. By the time they got there, YEAH Philly had paid the rent on his mother’s apartment to help her get ahead of her utility bills. The apartment was stocked with groceries and Aye had ordered Scott new T-shirts, pants, shoes, underwear and a jacket. He drove Scott to school, assuring him that he now had a new friend and mentor.

“Every time I talk to [Aye], he always says, ‘Anything you need, just ask me for it,’” the teenager said. “He is always texting me, and checking up on me, calling,

asking what I need."

Aye, with Scott, a teen he is mentoring. (Michelle Gustafson/For The Washington Post)

Scott literally carries the burden of gun violence around his neck. He wears a locket that includes photographs of two close friends who have been killed, including a 12-year-old shot in the head and dumped in a trash can in 2023.

But Scott said YEAH Philly has convinced him to give up any thoughts of revenge. Instead, the boy who used to steal cars is saving up his stipend to buy his own vehicle when he turns 16.

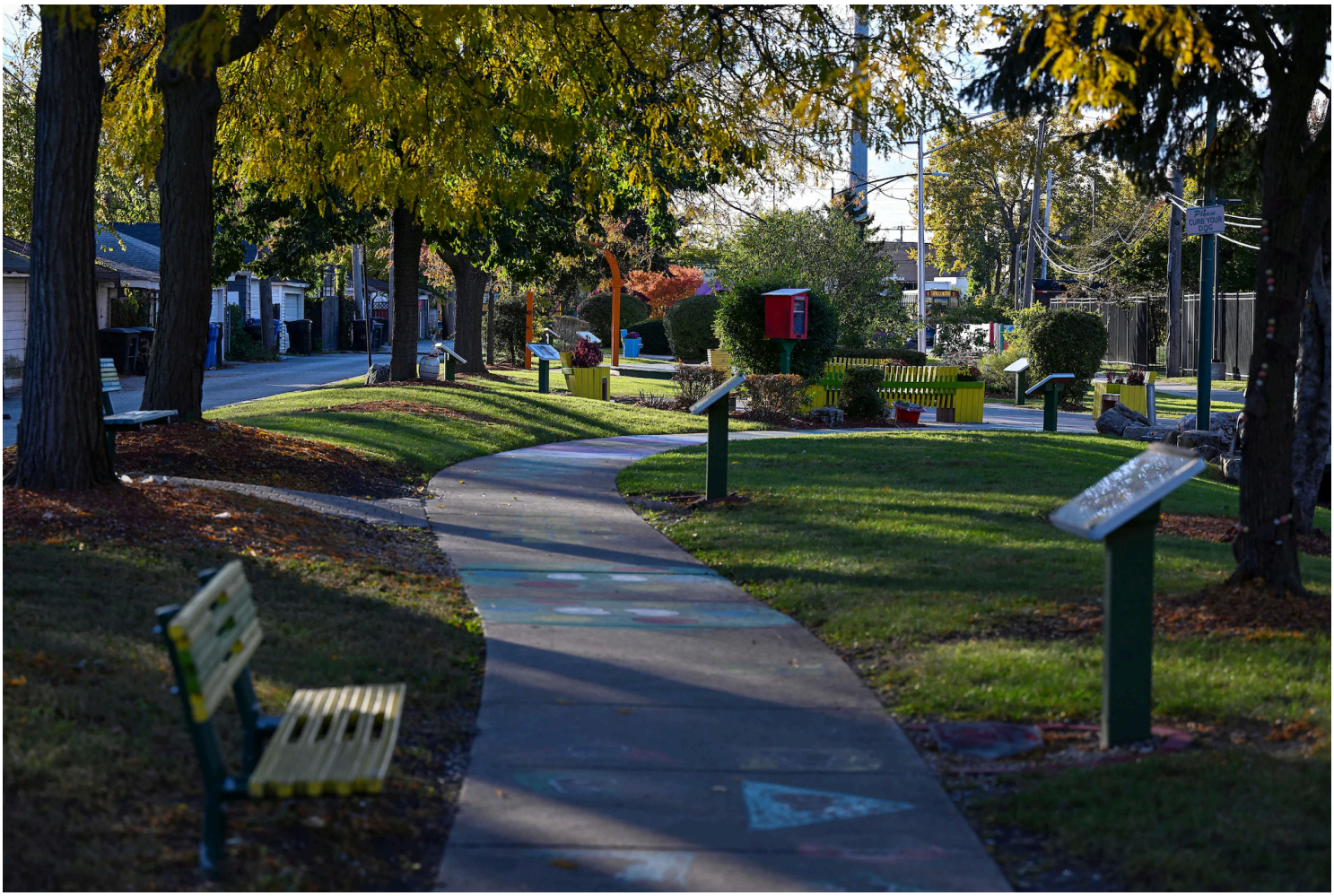
“I got this opportunity to get all of this stuff for my future,” Scott said. “So why would I want to do violence and mess with my future?”

CHICAGO

fewer homicides so far this year compared with the same period in 2021

Unity Park sounds noticeably different than it has in years past. There’s no crack of gunshots or sirens. These days, it’s often filled with the sound of children.

“We got parents that come in the park and do Easter egg hunts. We got parents that come in and they have their kids’ birthday party out there,” Gladys Woodson, 79, said of the park in the North Lawndale neighborhood that she co-founded and spent years beautifying. “Before, you would never see that happening.”



Plantings, signs and benches adorn Unity Park. (Joshua Lott/The Washington Post)

The park is a mini-oasis, a lush ribbon of grass not quite the width of a house that stretches just over a block between two alleys. Families largely stayed away during the years that killings in Chicago spiked.

In 2021, 46 of the 813 homicides in the city happened in North Lawndale, a mostly Black neighborhood on the city's West Side that has struggled economically since the 1960s and is seeing a new wave of Latino residents. Last year, the number of neighborhood homicides fell to 28, and this year it is expected to fall even more.

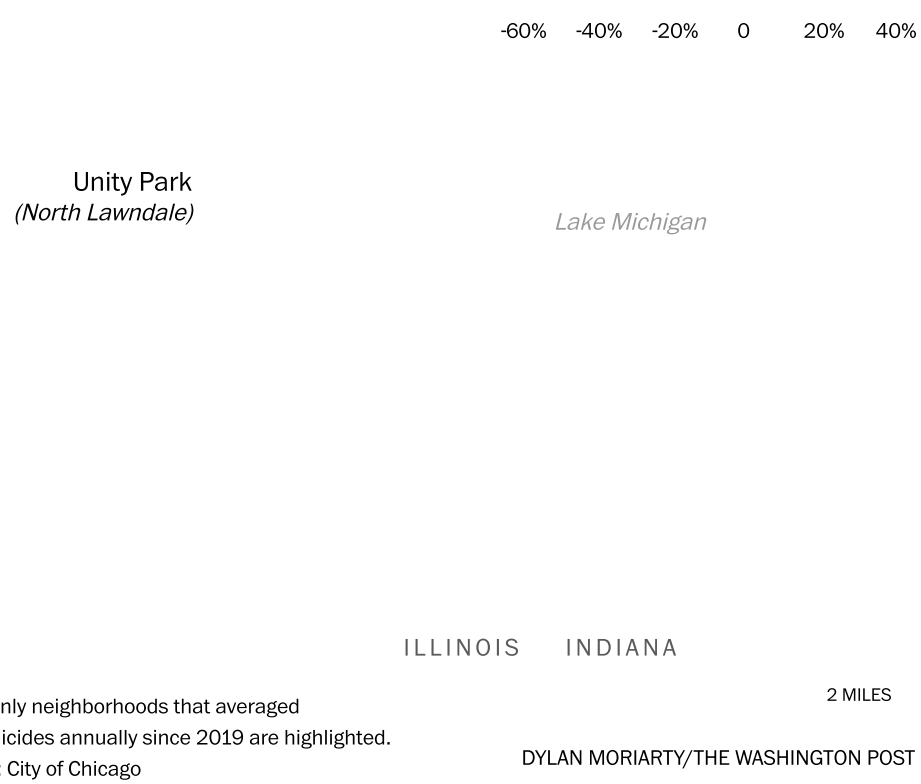
The rate of killings is still higher than many other places in the country. Yet the decrease has been enough to encourage people to reclaim space in their neighborhoods.

In Chicago, a drop in homicides from 2021 to 2024

In many of Chicago's deadliest neighborhoods, homicides have fallen since their 2021 peak.

Chicago

Decrease *Increase*



Wayne Cheeks started selling food to his neighbors in North Lawndale this summer because he felt safer than he has in years — maybe ever. He decorated his garage, which faces Unity Park, to look like a restaurant and began selling hot dogs, Polish sausages, Italian beef and nachos.

“No stickups, no bad food, no bad vibes,” the 57-year-old landscaper said.

“I remember them waves of killings and shooting,” Cheeks said, recalling both the pandemic-era homicide spike and the brutal 1990s, when police helicopters would frequently buzz overhead.

Back then, Cheeks said, he was part of North Lawndale’s rougher street life. Now, he can’t remember the last time something bad happened in the alley.

“No fights, no shootings, no rowdy crowds, none of that,” Cheeks said. “And everybody looks out for each other. It’s actually been safe — super safe, you know what I’m saying?”

Over the summer, kids and seniors would enjoy the park until nighttime, and then adults would come park their cars, listen to music and have cocktails, said Tyrone Buford, outreach director at the Firehouse Community Arts Center, an offshoot of a local church that provides youth mentorship, workforce development and other community programs.

The arts center organizes drive-in movies for families at Mason Elementary School near Unity Park. Buford, who mediates conflicts between neighborhood

cliques and links at-risk youth with job training and mentors, said the festive gatherings help persuade young people to try to be a part of the neighborhood community rather than destroy it.

Gladys Woodson worked to beautify this park in her Chicago neighborhood. (Joshua Lott/The Washington Post)

Woodson moved to the neighborhood from Mississippi when she was young. Her longevity has given her a degree of street cred among any would-be troublemakers.

“If Miss Woodson’s kids are there, they gotta keep it moving,” she said, referring to the young people who help her maintain the park and have started to take ownership of it. They’ll help set up or break down events like the Friday bounce house barbecues or spread fresh mulch to keep the park looking tidy.

Bringing up new stewards of the park is especially important to Woodson since Marion Perkins, her co-founder, died in October at age 95.

“I got a village,” she said. “And I tell everybody: Me and my village can just about do anything.”

INDIANAPOLIS

48% ↘

fewer homicides so far this year compared with the same period in 2021

David Lee III has an unusual way of measuring deadly violence: one funeral meal at a time.

Last year, Lee and his siblings paid for 20 meals for the grieving families of homicide victims — $500 to $1,500 per event for two main dishes, three sides, bread, dessert, drinks, with real silverware and decorations. But, as of Nov. 1 this year, only 11 families needed help.

That drop-off matches a similar decline in homicides citywide, according to data analyzed by The Post. Killings in Indianapolis have fallen from 271 in all of 2021 to 112 in the first 10 months of this year.

A funeral meal in Indianapolis for a 14-year-old girl who was shot and killed in January. (Courtesy of the Rose Foundation)

Lee can claim a bit of credit for why the number of killings has dropped so dramatically. He works for a city-sponsored group named Indy Peace that aims to reduce gun violence by knocking on doors to persuade parents to make changes when their son or daughter has been around gun violence as a victim, a shooter or a witness.

His boss calls him the "mother whisperer," because he is effective. But his message is blunt: If nothing changes, the next time he knocks will be to help the family pick out the suit their loved one will wear in a casket.

Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett (D) said his city's homicide decrease is largely attributable to Indy Peace, which was initially funded by the pandemic-era American Rescue Plan as part of the mayor's commitment to address gun violence. The organization works with local police to bring resources to neighborhoods that, according to data and the leaders' expertise, are most likely to experience crime.

As the pandemic funds were expiring last year, Hogsett convinced the city council to fund the program with city money. The council did so again this year, approving $4.5 million in the 2026 budget.

"It saves lives," the mayor said.

Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett. (Jon Cherry/Getty Images)

For Lee, the work is deeply personal. His brother was shot and killed in 2005. At the time, Lee said, his single mother was left with seven living children and no money for a funeral.

That's one reason Lee and his siblings fund funeral meals for others two decades later.

And it helps explain why Lee knocked on a door in the suburban city of Beech Grove one day last month, looking for Vito Duchan, a 21-year-old recently shot while sleeping in his bed. Police believe it was a stray bullet from a shooting in the street. But they know victims of violence often end up seeking to retaliate.

Through Indy Peace, Lee wanted to offer Duchan resources — including rideshare credits and diaper bank access — to reduce the chance of that happening.

The young man was not home, but his adoptive father called him on FaceTime. Lee made his pitch.

"Do you got a driver's license?" Lee asked.

"It's suspended," Duchan said. "I got to pay $275 on it."

Lee knows that no driver's license can mean no job. No job means desperation. And desperation breeds crime.

"Cool, don't worry about that," Lee told Duchan. "We can put you in a program that helps with that, and they help you get your license back. So that's why I want to get you connected, so that we can eliminate some of the obstacles that you're going through and then we can put you in a more productive state and moving forward in society. So does that sound good with you?"

"Yes, sir," the young man said.

Weeks later, Duchan has become a fellow for Indy Peace and is connected with city resources and a life coach. He will have 12 to 18 months to meet the program's goals and graduate, walking across the stage in a custom suit that Indy Peace pays for as friends and family cheer him on.

"That's what I'm looking forward to," Lee said.

LOS ANGELES

30%↘

fewer homicides so far this year compared with the same period in 2021

The former gang members crowded into the conference room of a strip mall office in South L.A. In their past lives, most were Bloods or Crips, and some were adversaries. But on this day, they all wore the same color: the fluorescent yellow vests of 2nd Call, a violence-intervention organization that works to stop shootings in the city's most dangerous neighborhoods.

This was a regular check-in, and 30 of the group's specialists took turns sharing updates from their corners of Los Angeles — who's beefing with whom, upcoming events that could turn deadly, schools that are seeing more fights.

Chalico Wilson, who goes by Shell Dogg, had some good news: An uneasy peace between members of the Black P. Stones, a sect of the Bloods, and a pair of Crips factions, the Rollin' 30s and Rollin' 40s.

"It's preliminary," said Wilson, who was born and raised in the neighborhood known as the Jungle. "But there ain't been no drama in two weeks, and that's good."

The détente was a long way from a true ceasefire or the splashy wave of talks that followed the death of beloved L.A. rapper Nipsey Hussle in 2019. But, Wilson said, it was a start.

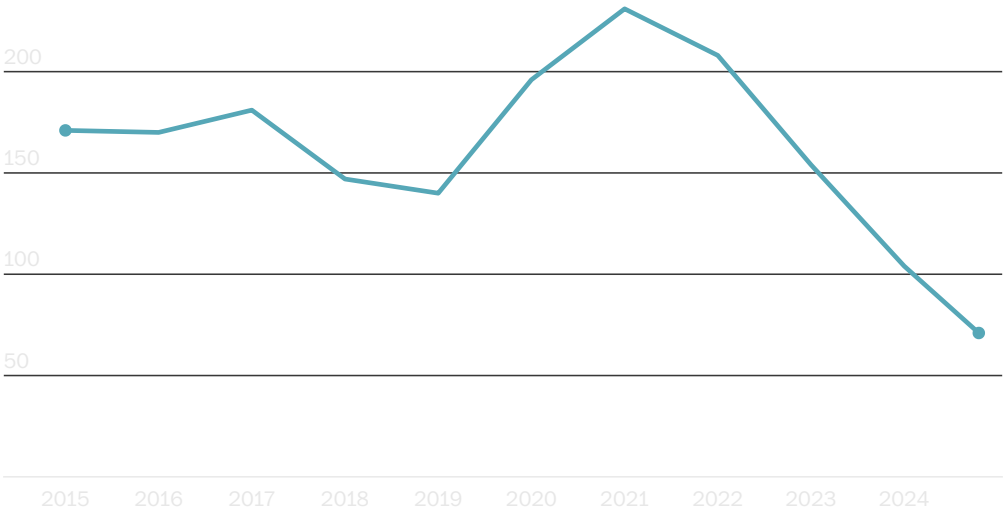
The 2019 death of rapper Nipsey Hussle led to talks between rival gangs in Los Angeles. (David McNew/Getty Images)

In the byzantine world of Los Angeles gangs, where alliances among hundreds of subsets often shift and feuds spread fast online, a truce is usually the result of intermediaries like Wilson. Their behind-the-scenes contact with gang leaders aims to interrupt escalating rhetoric that often ends in gunfire. Lately, Wilson and the large network of gang interventionists here are starting to see results.

After approaching 400 homicides in 2021, the number of killings in Los Angeles has declined steadily. So far in 2025, the city has recorded 220, on pace for its lowest total since the pandemic. There has likewise been a decline in “gang-related” homicides, a classification some advocates say is flawed.

In 2021, there were 230, accounting for nearly 60 percent of all killings. This year, as of mid-October, there have been 71, less than a third of L.A.’s total number of homicides.

L.A. gang-related homicides have dropped since 2021



Source: City of Los Angeles Mayor's Office

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass has credited the city's Gang Reduction and Youth Development office for the progress. In neighborhoods where the office contracts with roughly two dozen local violence-intervention groups like 2nd Call, gang-related homicides have fallen by 45 percent since 2023, officials reported earlier this year.

Independent studies of the effort have shown intervention workers reduce the rate of retaliatory shootings. A key tool is rumor control: Interventionists spend much of their time tamping down gossip about who started shooting and why. If two people from different gangs exchanged fire over a personal dispute, for example, then there's no need for a rival crew to seek retribution.

"We can save a life by picking up the phone and calling other communities and having a conversation," said Skipp Townsend, a former member of the Rollin' 20s Bloods who founded 2nd Call in 2006.

Townsend and other interventionists acknowledge their work can be dangerous, and fellow mediators have been killed in the line of duty, but they say it's worth the risk to make their neighborhoods safer.

Some of the high-powered rifles seized in an arrest targeting a gang in Los Angeles in 2017. (Michael Balsamo/AP)

Pacts between factions can be fragile and fleeting, but Townsend points to several examples of longer-lasting truces he has helped negotiate — like those between the Rollin' 60s Crips and Inglewood Family Bloods, or the East Coast Crips and Florencia 13 — as successful examples.

At the October meeting, Wilson said he wanted to capitalize on the two weeks of peace. He had plans to broker a sit-down with loyalists from both the Crips and Bloods sects — something casual, maybe over chicken and chess at a public park.

But first, they had to make it through the weekend, a time when violence can spike and gains can be erased. By Monday, the neighborhood was still quiet and Wilson could get to work.

About this story

Reis Thebault reported from Los Angeles. Katie Mettler reported from Baltimore. Tim Craig reported from Philadelphia. Kim Bellware reported from Chicago. Ben Brasch reported from Indianapolis. Data reporting by John D. Harden.

Photos by Jabin Botsford, Michelle Gustafson and Joshua Lott. Graphics by Carson TerBush and Dylan Moriarty. Design and development by Carson TerBush. Photo editing by Haley Hamblin. Graphics editing by Maureen Linke and Javier Zarracina. Design editing by Christian Font. Editing by Karey Van Hall, Anu Narayanswamy, Courtney Kan, Bill Duryea, Debbi Wilgoren and Meghan Hoyer.

Methodology

The Washington Post conducted its analysis using data collected from 52 police departments through emails and weekly reports.

The Post selected its five cities to investigate by focusing on large metropolitan areas where homicides peaked in 2021 and subsequently decreased each year through 2025. Comparisons to 2021 rates use numbers from the first 10 months of each year.

The coronavirus pandemic is shown on the charts from Jan. 30, 2020, to May 5, 2023, when it was classified as a global health emergency by the World Health Organization.

The Post used the FBI's supplementary homicide database to identify trends within each city on victim and assailant gender and age. Other variables analyzed included motive or circumstances surrounding the homicides, which includes gang-related or domestic violence.

571 Comments

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