

# The Columbus Dispatch

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## CRIME

# Odds of being shot in one Columbus neighborhood as high as one in 59, police study finds

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In an East Side neighborhood just off Livingston Avenue, the odds of being hit by gunfire last year were one in 59, according to a study by the Columbus Division of Police.

For comparison, the National Safety Council says a person generally has a one-in-106 chance of dying in a car crash.

Homicides and gun violence rose dramatically in Columbus in 2020, and the odds of being shot in the city were generally one in 626, according to the city police study based on estimated population in U.S. Census tract data. But in certain areas of the city, those odds increased dramatically.

Quay Barnes, chairwoman of the Mideast Area Commission that helps address issues within the troubled East Side neighborhood, said she was disappointed but not surprised to see that that section of the city is the most dangerous.

"I've lived in the neighborhood for 30 years and I've seen it slowly decline because of management," Barnes said. "The pride isn't there anymore."

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About 1,300 residents — nearly 50% of them earning below the 2021 federal poverty level of \$26,500 for a family of four — live in this high-odds area, which is between James and South Hamilton roads. The neighborhood is bordered by Livingston Avenue, Barnett Avenue, Cushing Drive and a set of railroad tracks. There were two homicides and 22 non-fatal shootings there in 2020.

Nearly all of the troubled area is contained within the Colonial Village apartments, which provides affordable housing.

"Not everyone who lives there is a bad person," Barnes said. "We want to have affordable housing, but we live here too."

Barnes said the commission has talked to the city, which has been cooperative in sending code enforcement, having an increased police presence and working with management at the complex to try and make the area better.

"Of course we'd like more, doesn't everybody?," Barnes said. "But they've put in a lot of effort and gotten management to do things we can't."

The commission plans to have food drives and provide supplies to people living in the complex to try and help connect them with the community at large on the East Side.

The Dispatch highlighted this same area of the city in its series "Under Fire," which looked at the increasing violence in Columbus during summer 2020.

Overall, the city saw an 89.5% increase in nonfatal shootings last year, from 757 in 2019 to 1,435 in 2020, which includes shootings of a person or occupied structure. Columbus also saw a record 174 homicides — a 67% increase from 2019.

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Certainly not every area of the city is as dangerous as that section of the East Side. If you live in Clintonville, where an estimated 30,172 people live and only one non-fatal shooting was reported in 2020, your odds were one chance in 30,172. And some neighborhoods had no shootings at all.

In German Village, the odds were one in 2,330. In Italian Village it was 1 in 519.

Go to one Census tract in South Linden, however, and the odds climbed to one chance in 81. That area is bounded by Duxberry and Maynard Avenues to the north, Billiter Boulevard to the east, Hamilton Avenue to the west and 17th Avenue to the south.

In all five areas of the city where the odds of being shot were greater than 1 in 100, more than 40% of the population reported incomes below the poverty line.

In one section of the West Side, including a portion of Franklinton and a stretch of Sullivant Avenue, the odds of being shot were 1 in 96. More than 73% of the estimated 2,306 people who live in that area live below the poverty line. The estimated median income was about \$12,000 in 2020.

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One of the safest places from gunfire in the city is a Census tract on the Northwest Side where the odds of being shot were one in 18,883. With an estimated median income of more than \$114,000, the area is bounded by Interstate 270 to the east, Hayden Run Road to the South, the Madison County line to the west and the Union County line to the north.

Fifty-one Census data tracts in the city did not report any shootings in 2020. These areas are home to 29% of the city's total estimated population of 898,553.

Richard Rosenfeld, a criminologist and professor emeritus at the University of Missouri, was one of the authors of a study looking at the increase in violent crime nationwide in 2020.

That study, which looked at 34 cities across the country over the course of the year, found a "perfect storm" of circumstances leading to the rise in violence, including the COVID-19 pandemic, loss of employment and social unrest over aggression by police toward the Black community and the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police.

According to the Columbus police study, the weeks of July 6 and July 20 saw the most shootings in Columbus, with more than 45 reported each week. The city saw a dramatic spike in the number of shootings reported starting in June.

Sometimes called the "Ferguson Effect," Rosenfeld said an increase in violence often happens after instances of excessive or unwarranted use of force by police.

"Sour or difficult relationships between communities and police departments make it that much more difficult for police to do their jobs, including curbing serious crimes," Rosenfeld said.

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Rosenfeld said police departments should focus on proactive policing in areas where the violence is concentrated and endorse police reforms to help bridge those gaps. But Rosenfeld also said city leaders need to focus on concrete actions and policies, not demonizing entire police departments. .

While mayors and city councils across the country can't control when the COVID-19 pandemic will abate, they can take steps to reduce crime and address underlying issues that contribute to crime, he said.

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Stephanie Hightower, president and CEO of the Columbus Urban League, said there needs to be continued and improved investment in organizations led by Black men and women to help the communities who are being directly impacted by the violence.

"We don't have enough programming right now for any of us that we can actually put in place to begin to address a lot of the structural racism ills that have existed for a long time," Hightower said. "We cannot expect that government is the only entity that is funding these kinds of community issues."

Rosenfeld also said treating violent crime and its victims in a similar way to those who have been sexually assaulted or a victim of domestic violence could pay dividends.

"You think of those problems, they too involve fear on the part of victims that the perpetrator might retaliate in some way, but the response of the larger community wasn't to throw up its hands and say they're afraid to cooperate," Rosenfeld said. "The response was to facilitate cooperation by enabling victims to get protection orders, establishing hotlines, shelters, legal advocates for victims. The same should be done for victims of violent crime, generally, and especially in the communities where the violence is so heavily concentrated."

The local Urban League has a violence interruption program that is working to stop instances of violence before they happen, particularly in the areas the Columbus police study showed have high concentration rates of shootings.

"We know those (Columbus police study) numbers are real based upon the front line work that my people do. But we can't be in all those places with only having a five-member team that's constantly monitoring Facebook, constantly monitoring other social media outlets to see where there might possibly be gang violence," Hightower said.

The Columbus police study found the city is especially dangerous between 8 p.m. and 2 a.m., when the majority of shootings take place, and nearly half of all shootings took place during the middle of the week (Tuesdays through Thursdays).

Hightower said addressing poverty, food insecurity and the wealth gap can ultimately help reduce violence by giving everyone in the city an opportunity to succeed.

"If we strengthen these urban areas, that strengthens the economy for the city and our region as a whole," she said. "You can only run so far, you can only go so far out in the county when you start looking at where the poverty lines are starting to reach."

"They're in the Gahannas, in the Dublins, into New Albany. Eventually, it will catch up to all of us."

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