2021 Homicide Statistics for 24 U.S Cities

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Introduction

This report examines homicide incidents that occurred in 2021 across 24 U.S. cities[1], including Rochester, New York. To account for population differences among the cities in this sample, we calculated the rate of homicides per 100,000 residents. This report identifies possible trends by highlighting the differences in homicide rates from 2020 to 2021 for twenty-four select U.S. cities. Cross city-comparisons are essential in understanding violence on a national scale. We used the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Crime Data Explorer tool to reflect 2020 homicide data and data gathered from local news outlets and police department websites for the 2021 homicide count. The data presented for 2021 in this report were not collected from the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) or other official sources. An official count of 2021 homicides cannot be determined by official sources for more than six months into the following year. Therefore, we anticipate small discrepancies in homicide counts when official data are released. This paper is updated and released annually to reflect yearly data.

Results

Comparing U.S. Cities

Table 1 compares trends in homicide across 24 U.S. select cities. The table shows percent change in homicide counts and rates from 2020 to 2021. By calculation percent change, we can identify differences in homicide rates over time. The cities are ranked from highest to lowest 2021 homicide rates. It should be noted that yearly fluctuations in homicide levels are a common feature of violence in America. There are three general conclusion that Table 1 supports: (1) homicide levels across U.S. cities vary greatly (59.5 range in homicide rate), (2) nearly two-thirds (62.5%) of our sample experienced increases in homicide rates from 2020 to 2021, and (3)

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[1] The 24 cities were chosen based on the Rochester Homicide Statistics report for 2019 & 2020 reports.

Rochester's homicide rate has increased substantially in the past year, going from the 10th highest homicide rate in 2020 to the 5th highest in 2021. These findings have remained largely consistent for three years.

Table 1. 24 U.S. Cities' Homicide Number, Rate, & Percent Change for 2020 – 2021

City	2020 Homicides	2020 Population Estimate	2020 Homicides Rate	2021 Homicides	Current Population Estimate	2021 Homicide Rate	% Change Number	% Change Rate
1. St. Louis, MO	263	301,578	87.2	195	299,798	65.0	-25.9	-25.4
2. New Orleans, LA	201	383,997	52.3	218	389,180	56.0	8.5	7.0
3. Detroit, MI	328	639,111	51.3	309	635,212	48.6	-5.8	-5.2
4. Richmond, VA	66	226,610	29.1	89	229,510	38.8	34.8	33.1
5. Rochester, NY	**52**	**211,328**	**24.6**	**81**	**210,820**	**38.4**	**55.8**	**56.1**
6. Compton, CA	18	95,740	18.8	34	95,663	35.5	88.9	89.0
7. Washington, DC	198	689,545	28.7	226	701,474	32.2	14.1	12.2
8. Atlanta, GA	154	498,715	30.9	156	508,040	30.7	1.3	-0.6
9. Indianapolis, IN	216	887,642	24.3	271	893,677	30.3	25.5	24.6
10. Oakland, CA	102	440,646	23.1	134	445,404	30.1	31.4	30.0
11. Chicago, IL	771	2,746,388	28.1	797	2,718,924	29.3	3.4	4.4
12. Hartford, CT	23	121,054	19.0	35	120,799	29.0	52.2	52.5
13. Buffalo, NY	61	278,349	21.9	67	277,708	24.1	9.8	10.1
14. Syracuse, NY	32	148,620	21.5	29	148,337	19.6	-9.4	-9.2
15. Newark, NJ	56	311,549	18.0	57	312,109	18.3	1.8	1.6
16. Pittsburgh, PA	48	302,971	15.8	55	302,486	18.2	14.6	14.8
17. Greensboro, NC	59	299,035	19.7	53	302,115	17.5	-10.2	-11.1
18. Dallas, TX	236	1,304,379	18.1	220	1,320,292	16.7	-6.8	-7.9
19. Denver, CO	97	715,522	13.6	96	730,691	13.1	-1.0	-3.1
20. Lexington, KY	28	322,570	8.7	36	325,537	11.1	28.6	27.4
21. Los Angeles, CA	351	3,898,747	9.0	392	3,917,850	10.0	11.7	11.1
22. Omaha, NE	37	486,051	7.6	32	488,092	6.6	-13.5	-13.9
23. Boston, MA	58	675,647	8.6	40	683,822	5.8	-31.0	-31.9
24. New York City, NY	468	8,804,190	5.3	485	8,821,798	5.5	3.6	3.4
United States	21,570	331,449,281	6.51	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Compton, California experienced the largest increase in homicide from 2020 to 2021, with a year-to-year rate increase of 89%. When compared to the rest of our sample, Compton's homicide percent change rate reflects an abnormally high increase. The only other cities to witness an increase remotely close to Compton's is Rochester, New York and Hartford, Connecticut, with a year-to-year rate increase of 56.1% and 52.5%, respectively. Besides these few anomalies, the remaining cities experienced an increase below 33.1%.

Over a third of our sample (37.5%) witnessed a decrease from 2020 to 2021. Boston experiences the largest decrease in homicide from 2020 to 2021, with a year-to-year rate decrease of 31.9%. St. Louis also experienced a considerable change, with a homicide rate decrease of over 25%. This difference is significant considering St. Louis's homicide rate has been steadily increasing since 2018. Omaha, Nebraska also experienced a considerable decrease of 13.9%. While a large decrease, this change may be due to a small initial value (37 homicides), an inherent limitation in percent change. In other words, small changes to a low homicide count can result in a high percent change, and thus, overestimating its' change.

Rochester, New York had a 56.1% increase in homicide rate from 2020 to 2021. Compared to the 24 cities in our sample, Rochester ranks 5th in terms of homicide rate. This is the highest Rochester has ranked in our yearly homicide report. When compared to New York metropolitan cities in our sample, Rochester had the highest homicide rate and percent increase. Though Rochester and Buffalo, New York had historically small differences in past years, the 2021 homicide rates reflect a difference of 14.3 homicides per 100,000 residents. Unlike in previous years, Buffalo, Syracuse, and New York City had lower homicide rates than Rochester in 2021.

Comparing U.S. Homicide Rates Among Cities with Similar Populations

To gain a broader understanding of violence in American cities, we compared 2021 homicide rates among cities of similar population sizes. Figure 1 shows a comparison of Rochester, New York with cities that have a population below 250,000. As seen in Figure 1, Rochester had the second highest homicide rate at 38.4 homicides per 100,000 residents. Though Rochester ranked 2nd highest in 2020 also, the gap decreased significantly between Rochester and Richmond, going from a difference of 4.5 homicides to less than one homicide per 100,000 residents.

The homicide rate for our sample cities with populations below 250,000 range between 38.8 and 19.6 homicides per 100,000 residents. In 2020, the range of homicide rates for these cities were between 29.1 and 19 homicides per 100,000 residents. These findings indicate greater variation in homicide levels among these cities. Nonetheless, Richmond, Virginia continues to have the most elevated homicide rates in this population category, a common outcome since the inception of our annual homicide reports.
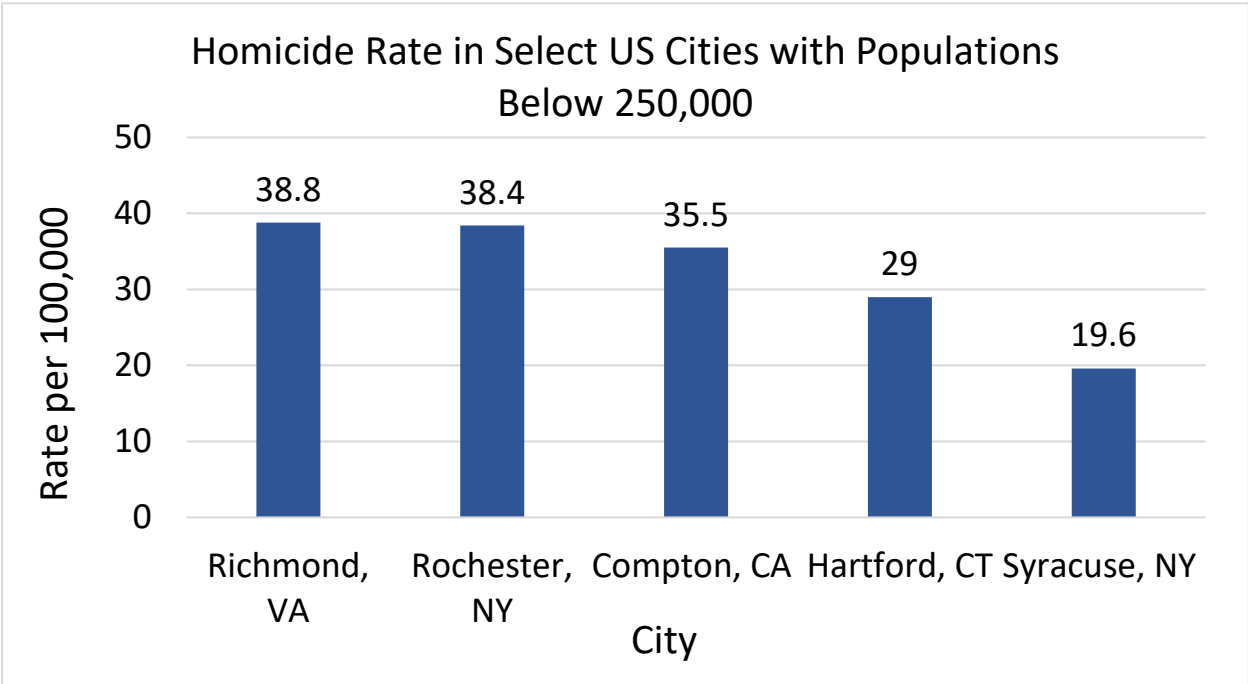
Figure 1.

Figure 2 is a comparison of seven cities within our sample with populations between 250,000 and 400,000. Immediately, St. Louis stands out with the highest homicide rate in 2021. Since 2016, St. Louis has remained the leading city in our sample. Consistent with past homicide reports, substantial variations in homicide levels for 2021 were present between these cities. Indeed, St. Louis reported a homicide rate nearly six times higher than Lexington's, roughly four times higher than Greensboro's, over three times higher than Newark's and Pittsburgh's, and nearly 3 times higher than Buffalo's. In other words, St. Louis homicide levels are exponentially greater than most cities and thus require additional research to determine their causes.
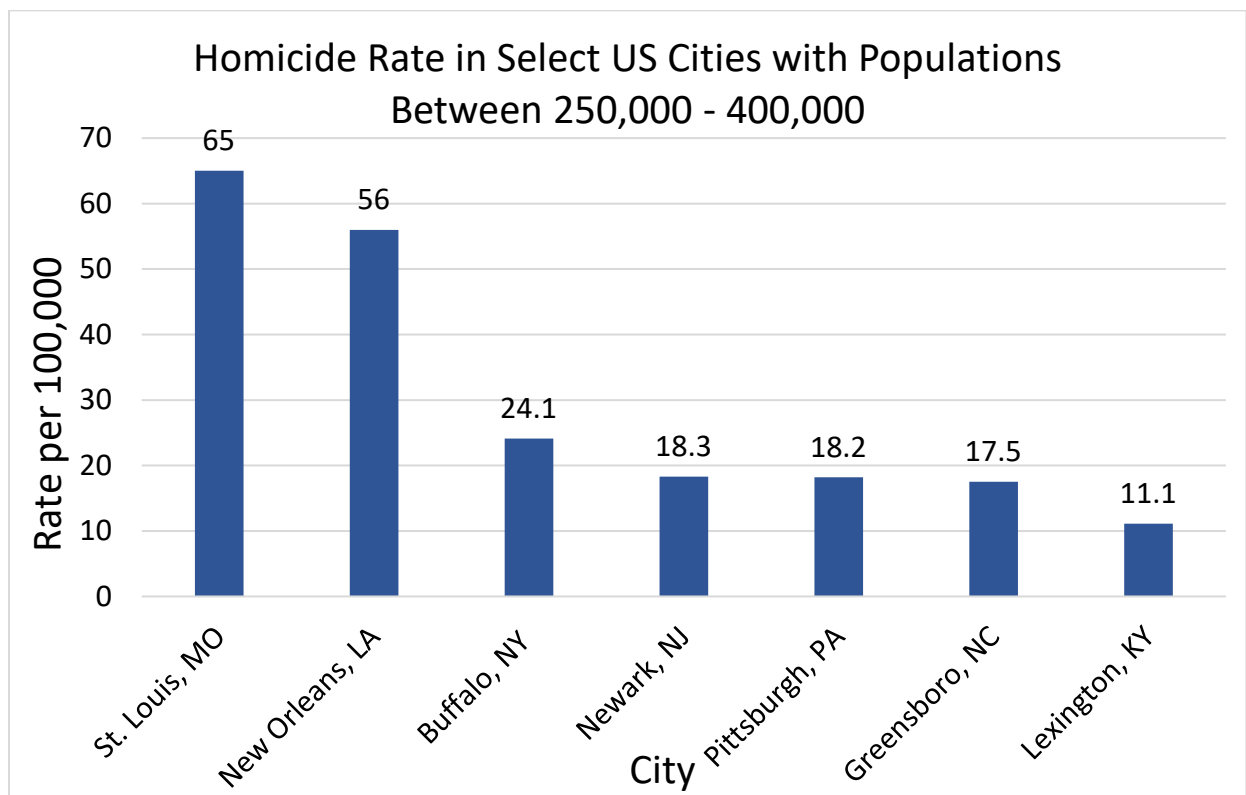
Figure 2.

Figure 3 displays homicide rates of our sample cities with populations between 400,000 and 1,000,000. Similar to previous years, Detroit, Michigan had the highest homicide rate in this population category, with a homicide rate of 48.6 per 100,000 residents. This makes Detroit the

third highest homicide rate in our entire sample. Figure 3 also highlights the substantial variations in homicide levels within this population category. Detroit's homicide rate is 3.7 times higher than Denver's, about 7.4 times higher than Omaha's, and nearly 8.4 times higher than Boston's homicide rate. Conversely, several cities depicted in this figure also have the lowest homicide rates in our sample. Denver, Omaha, and Boston currently rank 19, 22, and 23 in homicide rates, respectively. Further examination is required to attempt to explain the large differences within this population category.
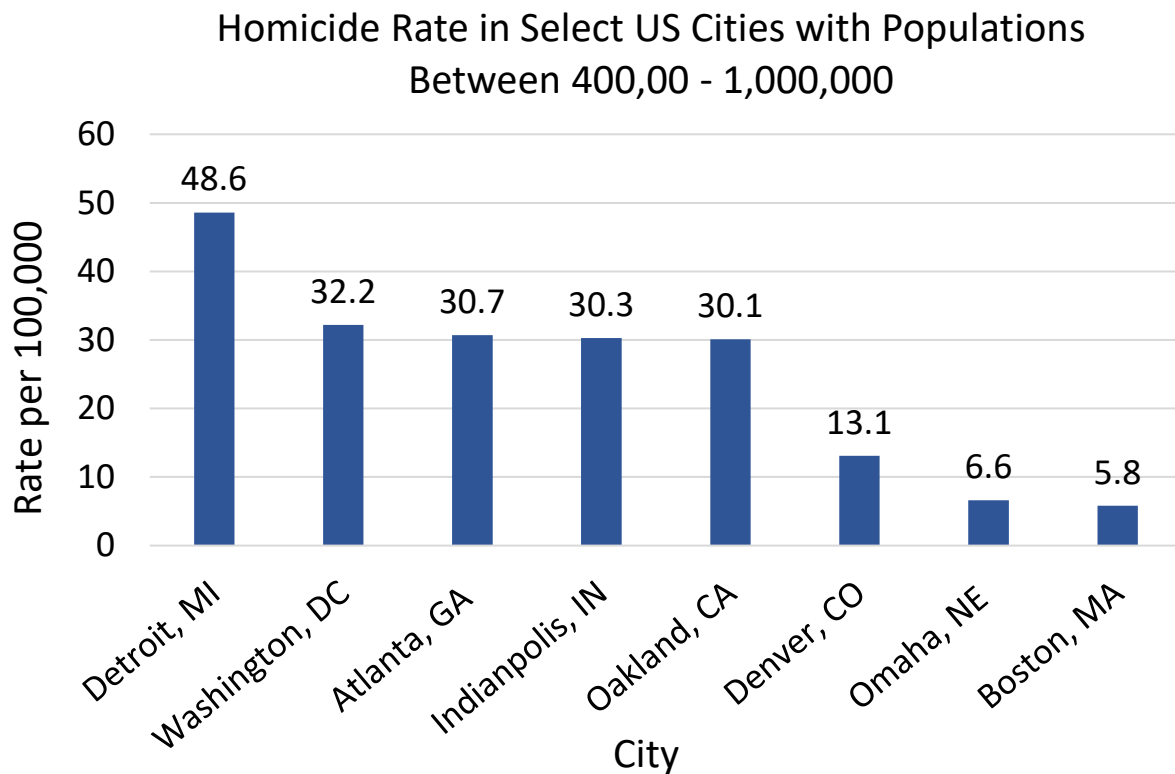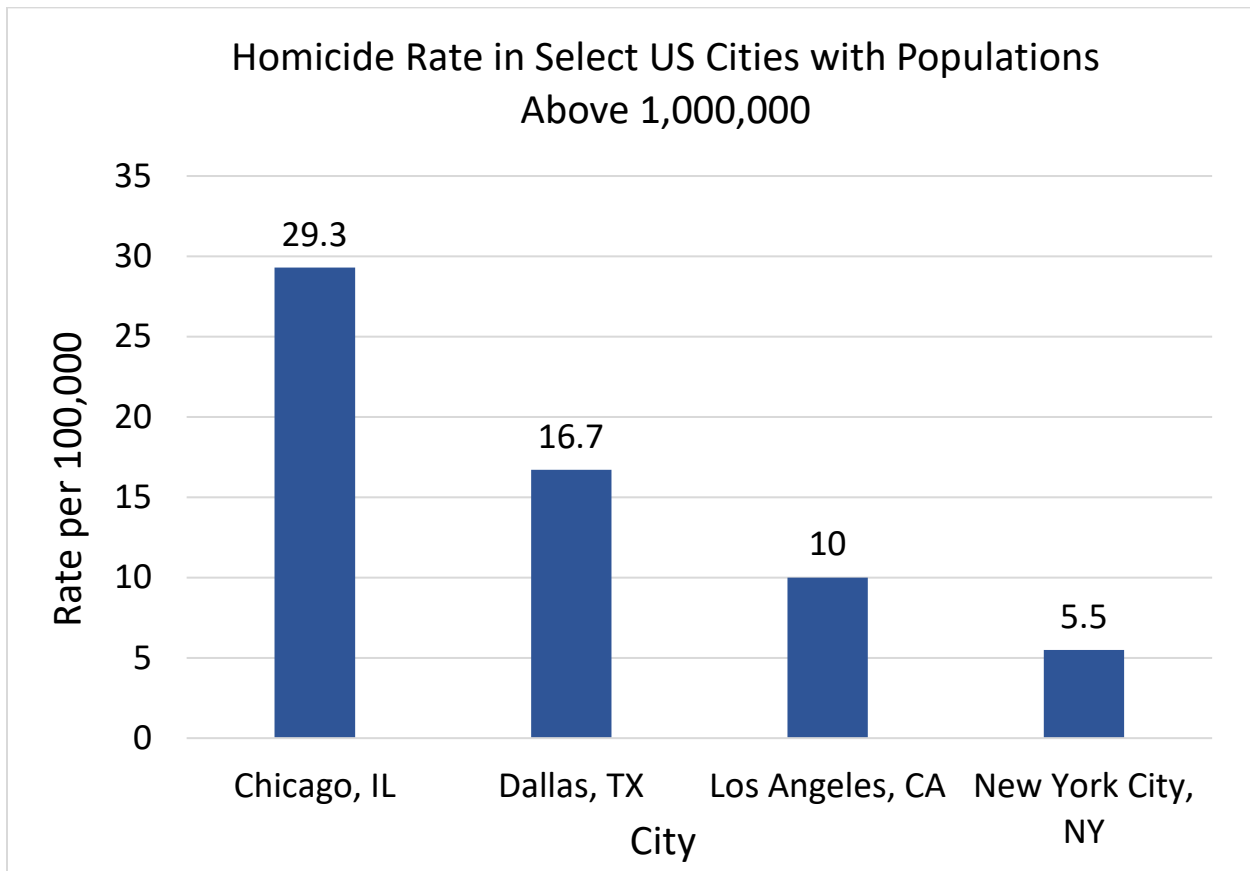
Figure 3.

Figure 4 examines homicide rates of sample cities with populations above 1,000,000. Of these four cities, Chicago has consistently had the highest homicide rate for the past four years. Despite this, Chicago ranks lower than nearly half of our sample which is a significant change from last year (5th in 2020). In accordance with past years, New York City had the lowest

homicide rate within our population category and overall sample. Though the most populous city in America and reporting the highest total number of homicides (485), the overall general risk of New York City residents is lower than any other city in our sample.

Figure 4.

Homicide Rate in Select US Cities with Populations Above 1,000,000

Conclusion

      The overall objective of this report was to analyze homicide rates and yearly changes across the nation. We found that American cities have considerable differences in homicide levels, with rates as high as 65 homicides per 100,000 residents (St. Louis) and as low as 5.5 homicides per 100,000 residents (New York City). Given that fluctuations in homicide levels are common, it is still unclear why these differences exist. Indeed, further research is critical for confirming the causes of this phenomenon.

We also found that homicide levels in nearly two-thirds (62.5%) of our sample cities experienced an increase from 2020 to 2021. Though initially alarming, it is important to note that changes in year-to-year homicide rates are not enough to identify long-term trends. While homicide levels increased substantially in 2021, they increased at a slower rate (Asher, 2021). Additional research should examine five- to ten-years of homicide level data to determine overall trends.

From 2020 to 2021, Rochester's homicide rate increased by 56.1%. Despite this concerning increase, it is not clear whether this trend will continue in subsequent years. Nonetheless, this increase should result in the reexamination of current homicide reduction efforts and support the development of new initiatives to reduce homicides in American cities.

The Center for Public Safety Initiatives has conducted this study for the last few years. When the FBI releases updated data on 2021 homicides, we intend to return to this report to compare the accuracy of our calculations against theirs. We hope this report serves as a valuable tool for local agency leaders and policy makers in their attempts to evaluate current strategies to decrease violence in our city.

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