

Chicago Homicide Beyond the Citywide Average

Trends, geographic concentration, and population-adjusted comparisons, 2015-2025

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Abstract

Citywide homicide totals describe the scale of lethal violence but do not show how it is distributed across communities. This paper examines Chicago homicide victimizations from 2015 through 2025 and compares community-area rates for 2015-2019 and 2020-2024. A dated extraction of Chicago Police Department victim records contains 6,959 homicide victimizations. Annual counts rose from 494 in 2015 to 806 in 2021, then declined to 427 in 2025. Population-adjusted, period-matched comparisons nevertheless show persistent geographic disparities: nine community areas recorded rates at least three times the citywide baseline during 2020-2024. The analysis uses occurrence locations, official community-area boundaries, and CMAP population estimates derived from the American Community Survey. Because these population estimates cover five-year periods, the paper distinguishes annual homicide counts from pooled geographic rates. Findings support examining both citywide trends and local concentrations; they do not establish causes or individual residents' probabilities of victimization. Population uncertainty, geographic allocation methods, and differences between official homicide datasets remain unresolved.

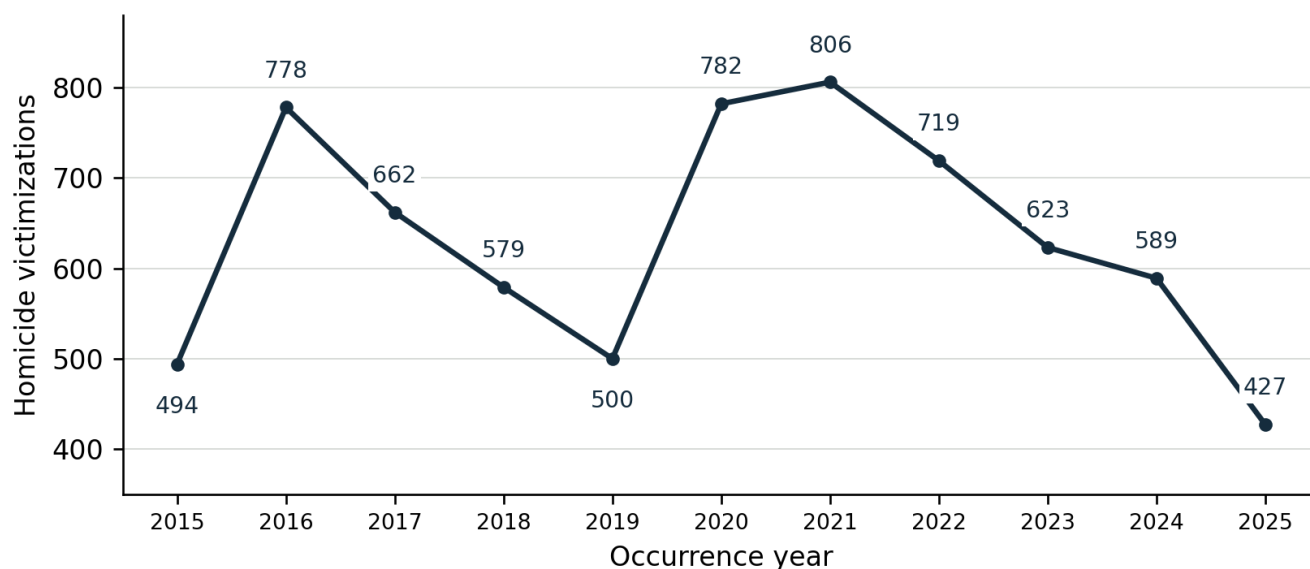
1. Research question and scope

How much does a citywide homicide trend reveal about conditions within Chicago's communities? The question has two components: whether homicide victimizations have changed over time, and whether exposure to lethal violence remains geographically concentrated. A decline in the city total does not, by itself, demonstrate improvement in every community.

The study covers criminal homicide victimizations classified as HOMICIDE in CPD's public violence-reduction victim dataset. It does not measure all violent crime or non-fatal shootings, nor does it attempt to make a judgement about overall public safety. The geographic unit is Chicago's community area, not an informal neighborhood or police district. Annual totals cover 2015-2025; population-adjusted spatial comparisons cover the matched periods 2015-2019 and 2020-2024. [1, 2]

2. Citywide homicide trends

Figure 1. Annual homicide victimizations, 2015-2025



Source: RSE calculations from CPD victim dataset, October 12, 2026 extraction. Each record is a homicide victimization, not necessarily a separate incident. Historical values may be revised. [1]

Counts rose from 494 in 2015 to 778 in 2016, declined to 500 in 2019, and increased again to 782 in 2020 and 806 in 2021. Counts then fell in each subsequent year: 719 in 2022, 623 in 2023, 589 in 2024, and 427 in 2025. Counts have fallen, but it would be reductive to label them as “low”.

The 2025 total is 47.0 percent below the 2021 peak and 27.5 percent below 2024. It is also 13.6 percent below 2015. These comparisons describe this dataset snapshot; they are not reconciled estimates from CPD annual reports or a claim about the lowest count in Chicago's longer historical record.

A different picture emerges when the full five-year periods are compared. The 2015-2019 period contains 3,013 homicide victimizations; 2020-2024 contains 3,519, an increase of 16.8 percent. Using population estimates for the matching periods, the approximate annualized citywide rate increases from 22.2 to 26.0 victimizations per 100,000 residents.

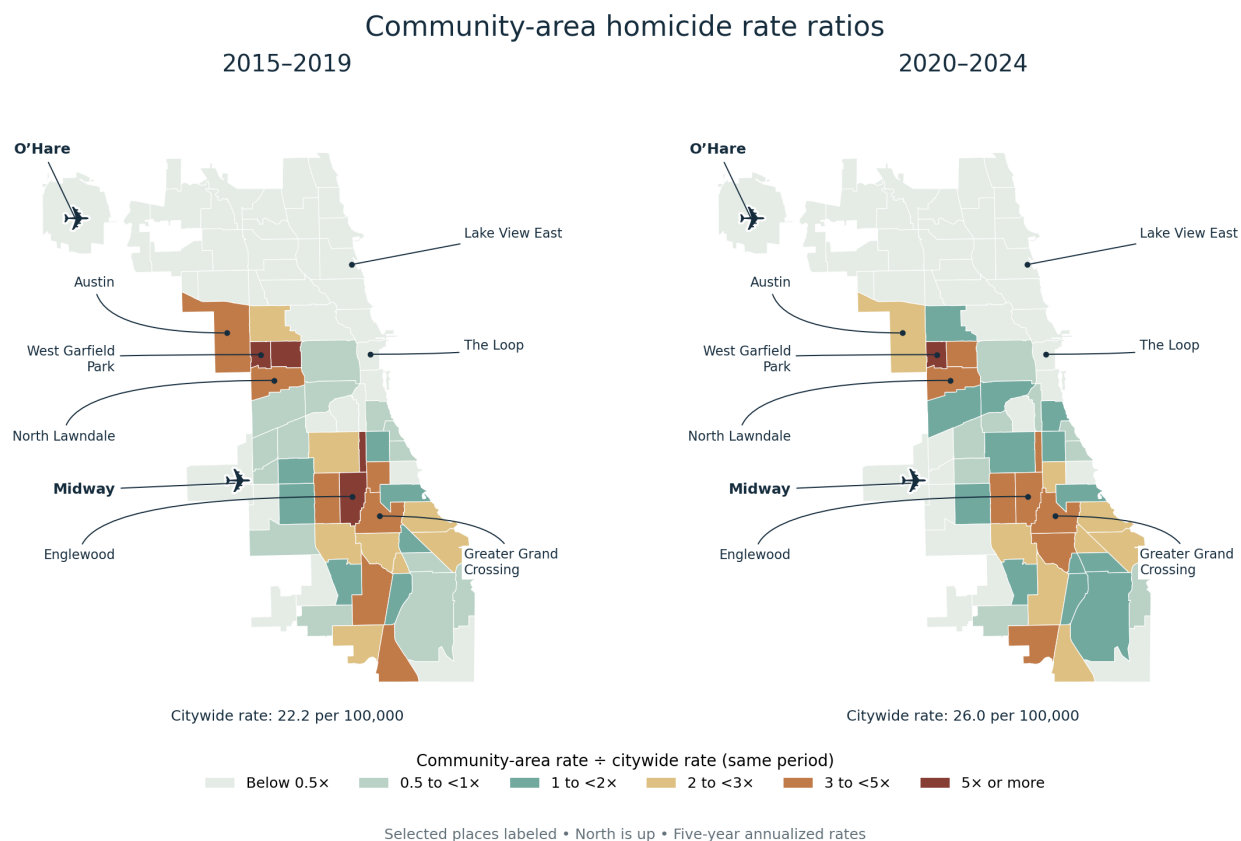
The higher 2020-2024 average and the subsequent 2025 decline are compatible. The later pooled period includes the high-count years of 2020 and 2021, while 2025 falls outside it. A five-year average can therefore remain elevated even after annual counts have declined. This is why the annual trend and the period-based spatial comparison answer different questions.

Interpreting the latest year

The paper reports 2025 as a count, not a population-adjusted community rate. The latest CMAP release retrieved for this analysis contains 2020-2024 ACS estimates. It does not provide a population estimate covering 2025. No population was carried forward or extrapolated to fill that gap.

3. Geographic differences relative to the city

Figure 2. Community-area homicide rate ratios



Color indicates an area's annualized homicide rate divided by the citywide rate for the same period. Identical bins are used in both panels. The baseline changes from 22.2 to 26.0 per 100,000; a lighter color **does not** necessarily mean an absolute-rate decline. North is up. Sources: CPD victim data, CMAP period population estimates, and City of Chicago boundaries. [1-3] Lake View East is an approximate neighborhood reference within the Lake View community area; the shading represents the whole community area, not a separate neighborhood rate.

The map is an exploratory comparison of event-location rates normalized by resident population. It is not a map of individual resident risk. Small populations can produce high or unstable rates, and population margins of error are not incorporated in this analysis.

4. Concentration and persistent disparities

Count concentration and population-adjusted rates describe different aspects of homicide. An area can contribute many victimizations because it has a large population; a smaller area can have fewer victimizations but a substantially higher rate. Both measures are needed to describe geographic disparities.

The five community areas with the largest counts accounted for 29.4 percent of all victimizations in 2015-2019 and 27.3 percent in 2020-2024. These are independently ranked groups, not a fixed set of areas. Austin had the largest count in both periods: 325 victimizations in the first period and 299 in the second. The other four members changed, so the share comparison alone does not demonstrate improvement within the same communities.

Population normalization reveals a sharper contrast. Eleven areas recorded rates at least three times the corresponding citywide baseline in 2015-2019; nine did so in 2020-2024. West Garfield Park, East Garfield Park, Englewood, Fuller Park, North Lawndale, West Englewood, and Greater Grand Crossing exceeded that threshold in both periods.

West Garfield Park illustrates why counts and rates should be examined together. Its homicide victimizations rose from 111 to 151 across the two periods, while the corresponding population estimates declined from approximately 16,421 to 15,096. The calculated annualized rate rose from 135.2 to 200.1 per 100,000. This is a descriptive estimate, not a statistically tested demographic or homicide-rate change.

Fuller Park illustrates the caution required for small areas. Its estimated population was approximately 2,395 in the first period and 2,345 in the second. Counts of 16 and 15 homicide victimizations produced annualized rates of 133.6 and 128.0 per 100,000. A high rate here reflects a small denominator as well as the numerator; it should not be treated as a precise ranking of community areas.

The number of areas above three times the baseline falls while the citywide baseline rises. This relative threshold cannot establish a broad reduction in disparities. The map supports a narrower finding: several community areas remain substantially above the citywide average in both periods, even as citywide annual counts fluctuate.

5. Methodology

5.1 Homicide records and extraction

The primary source is CPD's Violence Reduction - Victims of Homicides and Non-Fatal Shootings dataset (gumc-mgzs). The query retains rows where victimization_primary equals HOMICIDE and the occurrence date is at least January 1, 2015 but before January 1, 2026. The selected fields include unique victimization ID, case number, date, community area, ZIP code, coordinates, gunshot indicator, and update timestamp. Victim names were not needed and were excluded. [1]

Each unique_id represents a victimization. Counting rows therefore counts homicide victims/events of victimization, not distinct case numbers. Multiple victims can share a case number. The extraction contains 6,959 rows and no duplicated unique IDs. Annual and monthly counts are grouped by occurrence date, which the source describes as sometimes being a best estimate.

5.2 Geography and population alignment

Community-area names were matched between CPD records, CMAP population tables, and the City's 77-area boundary file. Case and punctuation were normalized; CMAP's The Loop was explicitly mapped to CPD's LOOP. All 77 areas matched. Source ZIP codes were retained for later use, but ZIP-based rates were not calculated because matching postal and Census population geographies requires additional work. [1-3]

CMAP's historical files provide total population for each community area in annual snapshot releases. The release year differs from the population survey period: the 2021 release uses 2015-2019 ACS estimates, and the 2026 release uses 2020-2024 estimates. Fractional values resulting from geographic allocation were retained, not rounded before calculation. These are estimated period populations, not measured single-year counts. [2, 4]

The two primary comparison periods do not overlap. Census guidance discourages comparing overlapping five-year ACS estimates as independent population changes. The downloaded annual vintages remain available for supporting analysis, but this analysis does not use them to claim precise year-on-year demographic changes. [4, 5]

5.3 Rates, baselines, and concentration

Annualized area rate = total homicide victimizations in the five-year period / (5x the population estimate for that same ACS period) x 100,000. Multiplying the period population by five approximates population-years; it is not an observed sum of five independently measured annual populations.

Citywide baseline uses all period victimizations divided by five times the sum of the 77 corresponding community-area population estimates, multiplied by 100,000. The summed denominator is approximately 2,708,526 for 2015-2019 and 2,711,119 for 2020-2024. Using the same population source for both area and city calculations avoids mixing allocation methods.

Area-to-city rate ratio = area rate / citywide rate for the same period. A value of three means three times that period's baseline; it is not a causal relative-risk estimate. **Top-five count share** = victimizations

in the five highest-count areas / total citywide victimizations. **Percentage change** = (later value / earlier value - 1) x 100.

5.4 Validation

Community-area and ZIP totals reconcile exactly to each annual citywide victimization count. Every extracted row has a populated community-area, ZIP, and coordinate field. Population joins match all 77 areas, and all denominator estimates are positive. These checks establish internal consistency; they do not establish positional accuracy or resolve differences between sources.

6. Limitations and publication checks

Source reconciliation. A separate query of Chicago's Crimes - 2001 to Present dataset yields different homicide-record totals. For example, it returns 440 for 2025, compared with 427 in the primary victim series. The sources were not blended. Definitions, classification, timing, jurisdictional coverage, or revisions must be investigated before reconciling the difference; no specific explanation is established here. [1, 6]

Population measurement. ACS populations are sample-based period estimates. This analysis does not incorporate margins of error or confidence intervals. Tract-boundary changes and CMAP allocation methods across releases must be reviewed before treating estimated population changes as confirmed. Population uncertainty is especially consequential in smaller areas. [2, 4, 5]

Location versus residence. Homicides are assigned to the place where victimization occurred, while denominators count residents. Visitors, commuters, and travel across areas can affect this relationship. Rates therefore describe lethal events relative to resident population; they do not directly measure residents' personal chances of becoming victims.

Temporal and substantive scope. Pooled rates can conceal annual variation. The 2025 count decline does not establish which communities improved that year. The paper excludes non-fatal shootings and other offenses and does not test explanations involving policing, prosecution, economic conditions, demographics, or violence-intervention programs.

7. Conclusion

The current extraction shows a substantial citywide homicide decline after 2021, alongside persistent geographic differences in the two pooled comparison periods. These findings support reporting annual totals and community-level rates together. They do not yet establish that disparities narrowed, that all communities benefited equally, or why homicide changed. The study provides a reproducible descriptive foundation; source reconciliation and population-method review can strengthen this analysis. Supporting data extracts and calculation materials are available from RSE upon reasonable request.

Sources and reproducibility

[1] CPD victim dataset (gumc-mgzs). City of Chicago.

<https://data.cityofchicago.org/d/gumc-mgzs>

[2] CMAP Community Data Snapshots Historical Data, 2015-2026.

<https://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=bb7caf6a22e646fdad2a6819059f11f8>

[3] City of Chicago community-area boundaries (igwz-8jzy).

<https://data.cityofchicago.org/d/igwz-8jzy>

[4] Census Bureau. Using 1-Year or 5-Year ACS Data.

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/guidance/estimates.html>

[5] Census Bureau. Comparing ACS Data.

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/guidance/comparing-acs-data.html>

[6] Chicago Crimes - 2001 to Present (ijzp-q8t2).

<https://data.cityofchicago.org/d/ijzp-q8t2>

Supporting extraction queries, source metadata, CSV tables, and calculation scripts are retained in the accompanying RSE data packages. All statistics in this analysis are RSE calculations from those frozen extracts. Figure 2 uses the same category thresholds in both periods. No inferential significance tests were performed.

Any questions? Just ask:

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