

# Knoxville, Tennessee **GUN VIOLENCE PROBLEM ANALYSIS**

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Summary Report | January 2022 – December 2024



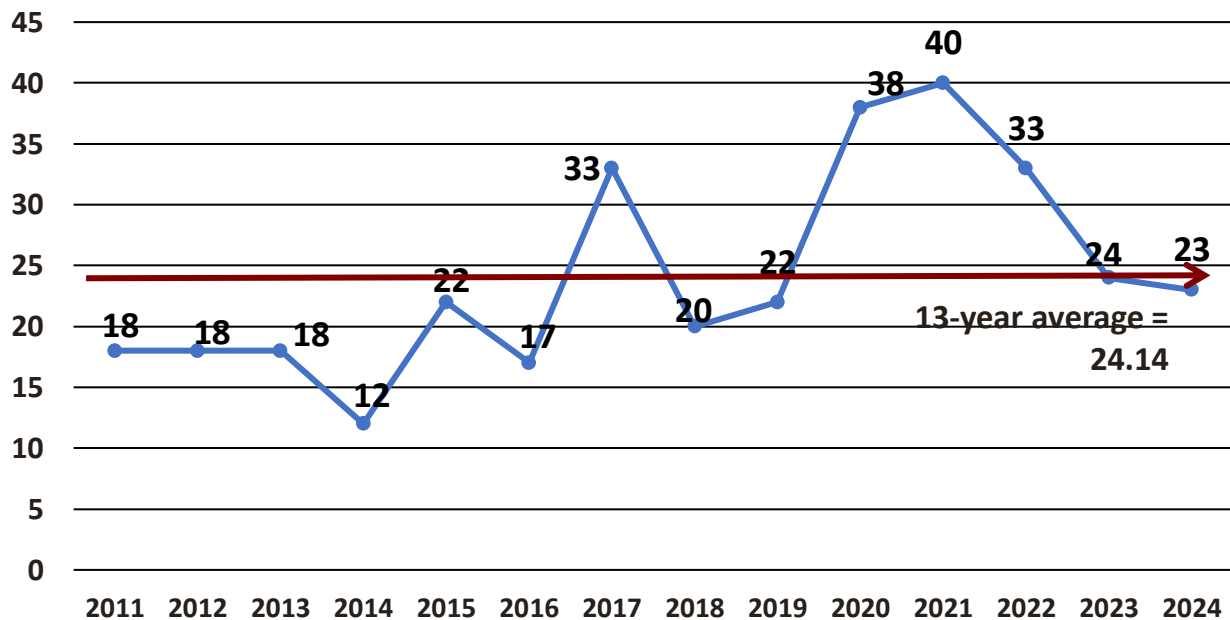
October 2025

## Knoxville Gun Violence Problem Analysis Summary Report

In partnership with the City of Knoxville, including the Knoxville Police Department (KPD) and the Office of Community Safety (OCS), the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) conducted this detailed analysis of shootings and homicides in Knoxville, Tennessee, from 2022–2024. A Gun Violence Problem Analysis (GVPA) is a set of analytical exercises designed to support the implementation of violence reduction strategies; the GVPA is a research-based methodology used in a number of cities nationally.<sup>1</sup>

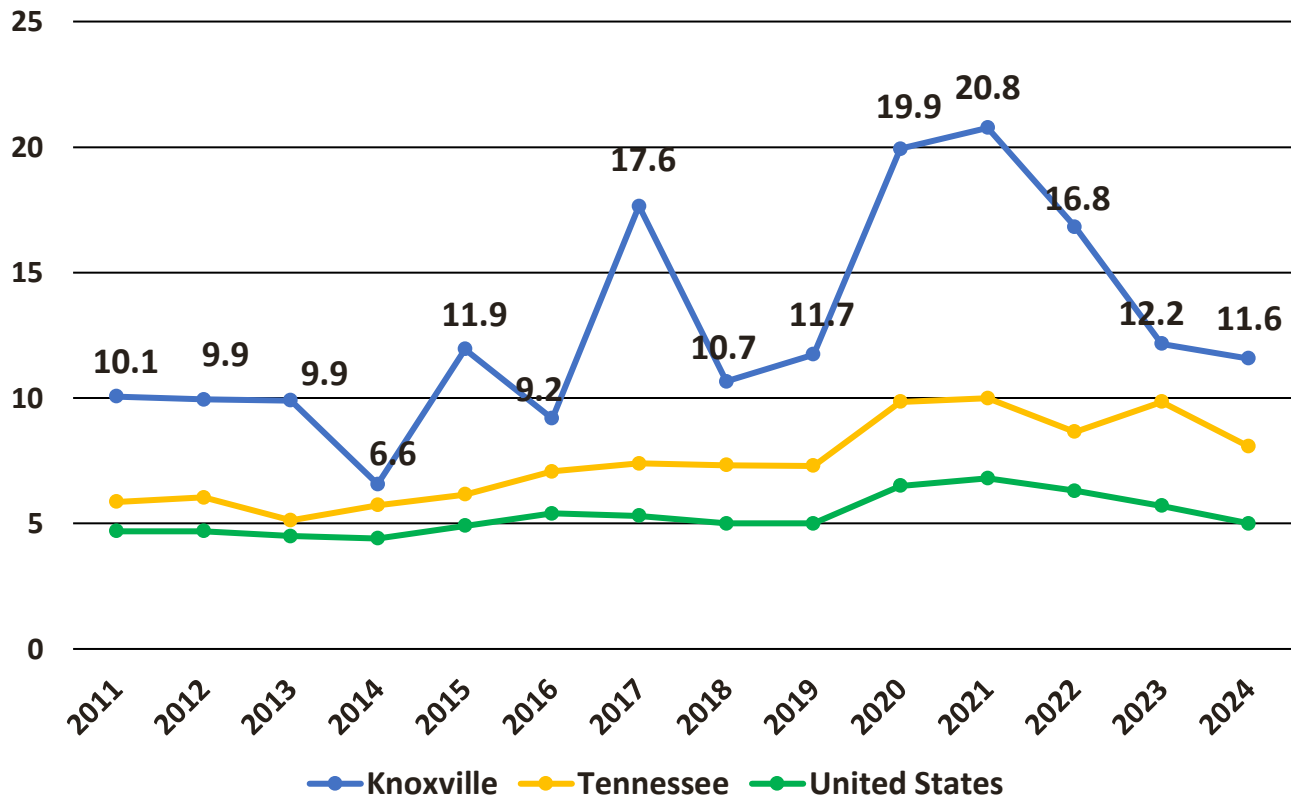
The homicide rate in Knoxville has remained higher than both the national and statewide rates since 2011 (Figure 2). The average homicide rate in Knoxville from 2011–2024 was 12.78 per 100,000 residents, while the national homicide rate during the same period was 5.30 per 100,000 people, and the rate across Tennessee was 7.46 per 100,000 people. Like most US cities, Knoxville experienced an increase in violence with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Homicides in Knoxville have decreased significantly in the past three years (Figure 1), and in 2025, Knoxville is on pace to have fewer than 20 for the first time since 2016.

*Figure 1. Knoxville Criminal Homicides, 2011–2024*



<sup>1</sup> In 2022, NICJR worked with the City of Knoxville to develop a GVPA covering gun violence dynamics from 2019–2021.

Figure 2. Homicide Rate per 100,000 Residents, 2011–2024



This GVPA examined all homicides in Knoxville across the three years between January 1, 2022, and December 31, 2024 (n=82), as well as all nonfatal injury shootings over the same period (n=167). The 82 homicides involved 82 unique victims and 71 identified suspects, and the 167 nonfatal shooting incidents involved 194 unique victims and 156 identified suspects. This analysis examines the characteristics of these incidents and the individuals involved, including demographics and criminal justice system involvement.

Before summarizing these findings, it is important to define several terms used throughout this report:

- **Homicide:** A criminal homicide in which a killing was intentional or due to criminal negligence (i.e., murder).
- **Nonfatal Shooting:** A shooting incident involving criminal intent in which a victim was struck and injured by a firearm.
- **Community Supervision:** The supervision of someone convicted of an offense and placed on correctional supervision, including probation or parole.

- **Group:** A wide range of dynamics and structures present in criminally active street groups. Individuals at high risk for violence are likely to associate within particular groups and social networks, ranging from more highly organized, formal gangs to more loosely associated, informal neighborhood crews.
- **Suspect:** A person arrested and/or a person of interest for a nonfatal shooting or homicide.

### Suspects and Victims in Homicides and Nonfatal Shootings

Suspects and victims in homicides and nonfatal shootings in Knoxville are primarily men between the ages of 18–34 (Table 1. Homicide and Nonfatal Shooting Suspects and Victims: Age. For homicides, the average age of suspects and victims is 35.65, and 46.4% are between the ages of 18–34 (Table 1); in addition, 83.66% are male, and 59.48% are Black (Table 2, 3). For nonfatal shootings, the average age of suspects and victims is 28.8, and 64.29% are between the ages of 18–34 (Table 1). They are also primarily male (81.21%) and Black (68.02%) (Table 2, 3). While Black residents make up only 15.79% of Knoxville’s population, Black people overall, and Black men in particular, are highly overrepresented among victims and suspects of gun violence, highlighting the need for focused, community-specific interventions.

*Table 1. Homicide and Nonfatal Shooting Suspects and Victims: Age<sup>2</sup>*

Age Range	Homicides			Nonfatal Shootings		
	Suspects (n=71)	Victims (n=82)	Victims & Suspects (n=153)	Suspects (n=156)	Victims (n=194)	Victims & Suspects (n=350)
17 and under	5.63%	3.66%	4.58%	8.33%	8.25%	8.29%
18-24	19.72%	20.73%	20.26%	36.54%	35.57%	36.00%
25-34	30.99%	21.95%	26.14%	30.13%	26.80%	28.29%
35-44	18.31%	21.95%	20.26%	19.87%	16.49%	18.00%
45-54	8.45%	21.95%	15.69%	3.85%	8.76%	6.57%
55 and older	16.90%	9.76%	13.07%	1.28%	4.12%	2.86%
Average Age	34.72	36.45	35.65	27.61	29.76	28.80

<sup>2</sup> Variations in data availability contributed to differences in sample sizes (n’s) across the analyses.

*Table 2. Homicide and Nonfatal Shooting Suspects and Victims: Sex*

	Homicides			Nonfatal Shootings			
Sex	Suspects (n=71)	Victims (n=82)	Victims & Suspects (n=153)	Suspects (n=153)	Victims (n=193)	Victims & Suspects (n=346)	Knoxville Population
Female	9.86%	21.95%	16.34%	13.07%	23.32%	18.79%	49.40%
Male	90.14%	78.05%	83.66%	86.93%	76.68%	81.21%	50.60%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

*Table 3. Homicide and Nonfatal Shooting Suspects and Victims: Race<sup>3</sup>*

	Homicides			Nonfatal Shootings			
Race	Suspects (n=71)	Victims (n=82)	Suspects & Victims (n=153)	Suspects (n=152)	Victims (n=192)	Suspects & Victims (n=344)	Knoxville Population
Asian	-	-	-	-	0.52%	0.29%	2.27%
Black	64.79%	54.88%	59.48%	71.71%	65.10%	68.02%	15.79%
Latino	2.82%	4.88%	3.92%	1.97%	6.25%	4.36%	7.94%
Native American	-	-	-	-	1.04%	0.58%	0.29%
White	32.39%	40.24%	36.60%	26.32%	27.08%	26.74%	68.70%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	-

### Criminal Justice System Involvement

Fifty-four homicide suspects (76.06%) and 35 homicide victims (42.68%) were found to have had prior criminal justice system involvement. A total of 39.44% of homicide suspects and 28.17% of homicide victims had previously been incarcerated,<sup>4</sup> 16.90% of homicide suspects and 19.51% of homicide victims had previously been on probation, and 11.26% of homicide suspects and 12.20% of homicide victims were on active probation or parole supervision at the time of the homicide. Among those individuals with a known prior KPD arrest, the majority of homicide suspects (63.38%) had prior arrests for violent offenses.

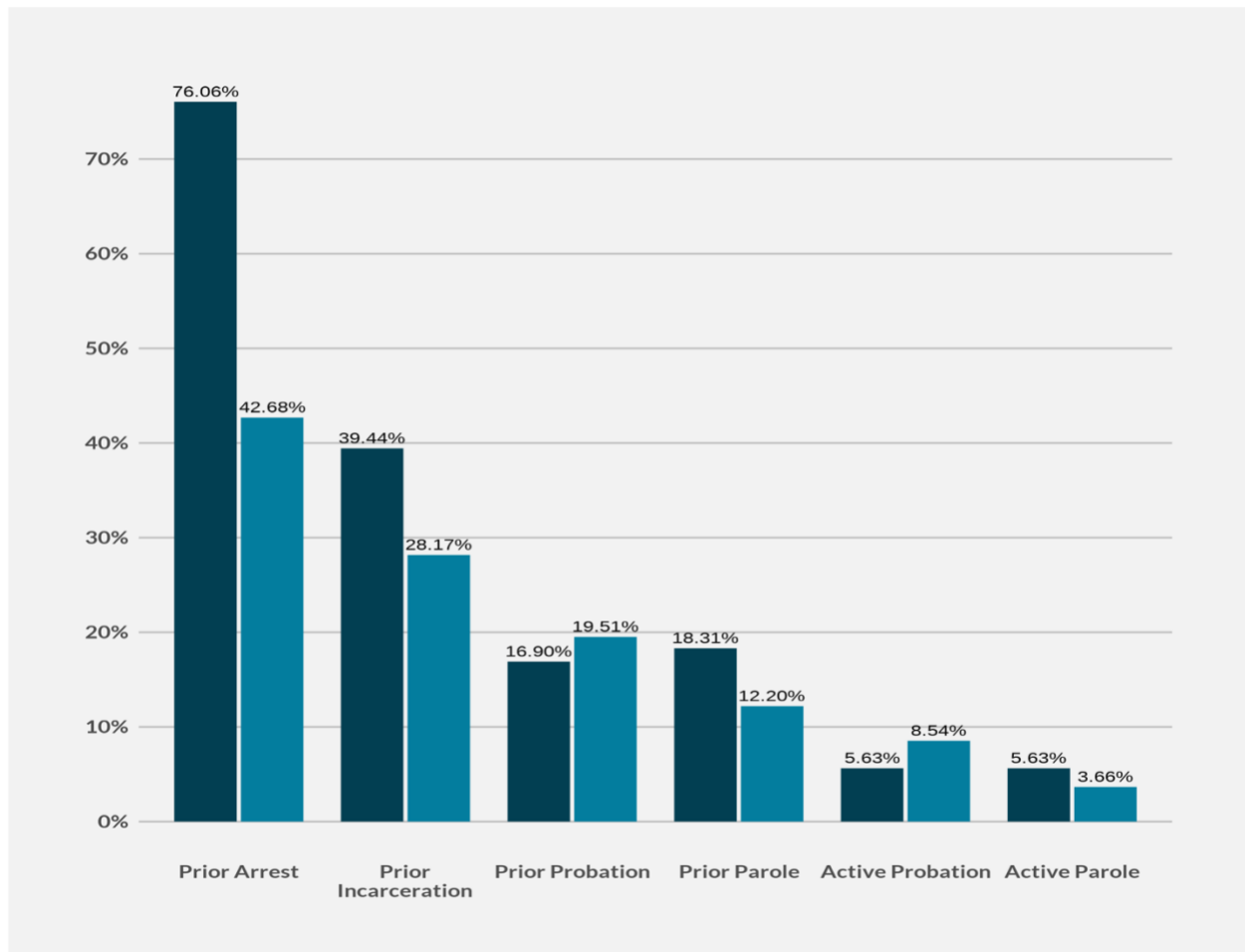
In addition, 94 nonfatal shooting suspects (60.26%) and 105 nonfatal shooting victims (54.12%) had prior criminal justice system involvement. A total of 32.69% of nonfatal shooting suspects and 25.77% of nonfatal shooting victims had previously been incarcerated, while 32.69% of nonfatal shooting suspects and 24.23% of nonfatal shooting victims had previously been on

<sup>3</sup> Because the Census separates out people who are multiracial but KPD does not, population totals do not match.

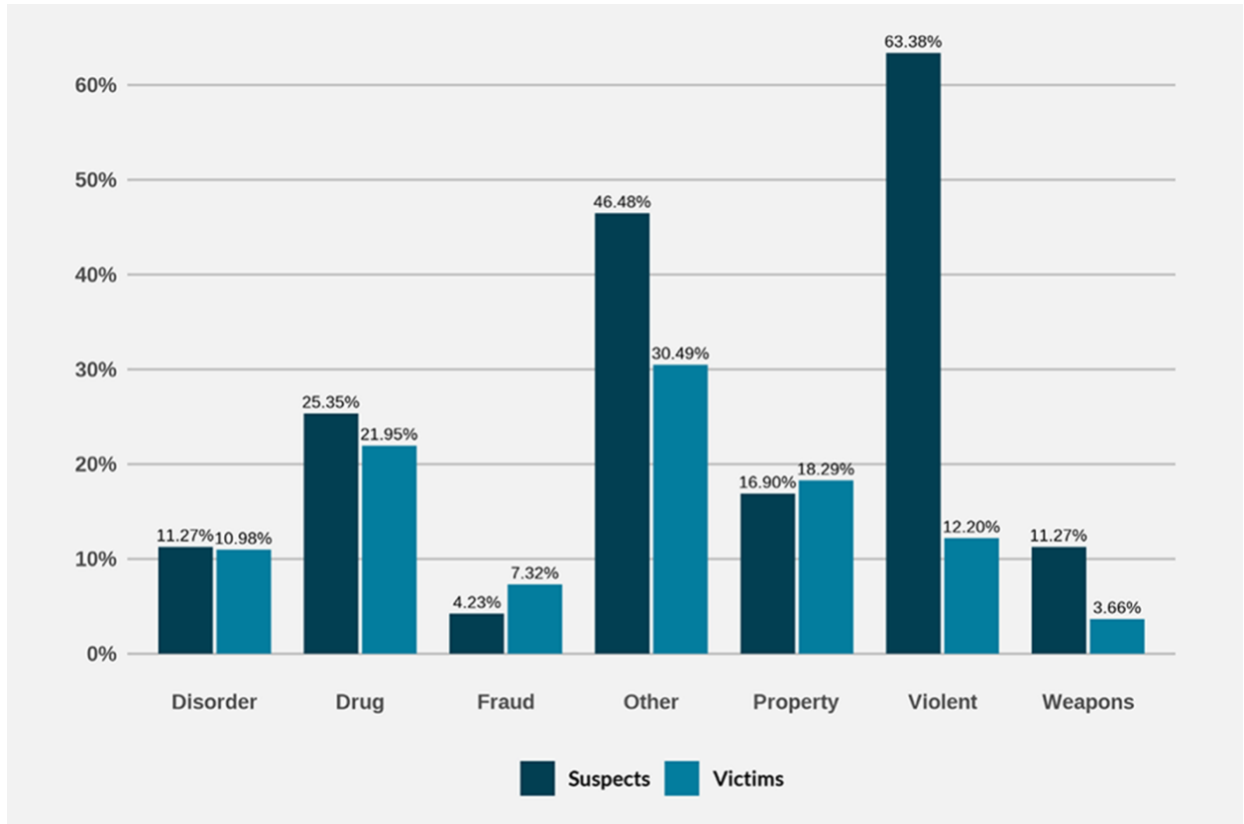
<sup>4</sup> Only includes incarceration by the Tennessee Department of Corrections; it is highly likely that additional individuals were incarcerated in local county jails, pre-and/or post-conviction.

probation. Additionally, 15.38% of nonfatal shooting suspects and 13.40% of nonfatal shooting victims were on active probation or parole supervision at the time of the incident. Among those individuals with a known prior KPD arrest, almost half of nonfatal shooting suspects (49.36%) had prior arrests for violent offenses.

*Figure 3. Prior Criminal Justice System Involvement of Homicide Suspects and Victims*



*Figure 4. Types of Prior Arrests Among Homicide Suspects and Victims*



Homicide suspects had significantly more prior criminal justice system involvement than did homicide victims, and they were much more likely to have previously been arrested for violent incidents. Both of these findings differ from findings in the 2022 GVPA. In recent years, more homicide suspects had more prior contact with the criminal justice system and more prior arrests than suspects did in the prior analysis, while fewer homicide victims had criminal histories, and those who did were less likely to have been involved in violence.

### **Repeat Involvement**

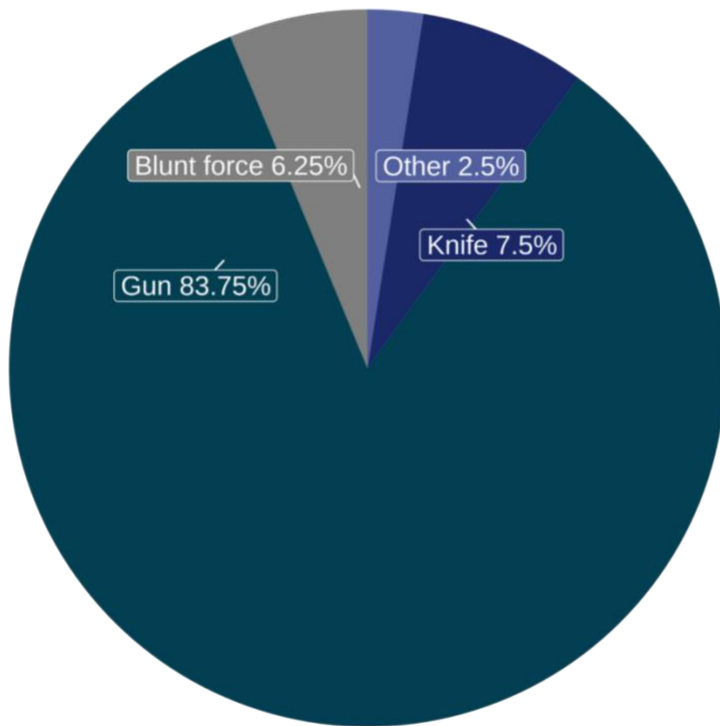
During the study period, 25 individuals were involved in multiple shootings, including 22 individuals who were involved in two shootings, two who were involved in three shootings, and one who was involved in more than four shootings. All 25 individuals were Black and male. At the time of their first shooting, five individuals (20%) were under 18, 15 individuals (60%) were between 18–34 years old, and four individuals (16%) were older than 35.

## Incident Analysis

### Homicides

This analysis examined all homicides in Knoxville from January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2024 (n=82). The vast majority (83.75%) of homicides during that period involved a gun (Figure 5).

*Figure 5. Homicides, Broken Down by Weapons and Causes*



For homicides in which detectives had any knowledge about gang or group dynamics, 61.4% involved known or suspected group members as victims, suspects, or both. When homicides involved group members as victims and/or suspects, the most common reason was ongoing group conflicts, followed by personal disputes. Personal disputes and domestic violence were the most common reasons for homicides that did not involve group members (Table 4).

*Table 4. Homicide Circumstances and Group Involvement*

Circumstance	Group Involved		Total	
	N	%	N	%
Domestic Violence	3	8.57%	16	19.51%
Drug Robbery	1	2.86%	2	2.44%
Drug-Related Dispute	3	8.57%	5	6.10%
Instant Dispute	5	14.29%	13	15.85%
Internal Group Conflict	1	2.86%	1	1.22%
Ongoing Group Conflict	7	20.00%	9	10.98%
Other	1	2.86%	4	4.88%
Personal Dispute	7	20.00%	17	20.73%
Retaliation/Revenge	1	2.86%	1	1.22%
Robbery	4	11.43%	5	6.10%
Unknown	2	5.71%	9	10.98%
Total	35	42.68%	82	100.00%

### Nonfatal Shootings

Dynamics were similar for nonfatal shootings: 56.9% of shooting incidents in which detectives were aware of gang/group dynamics involved group members as either victims, suspects, or both. When shootings involved group members as victims and/or suspects, 32.26% were tied to ongoing group conflicts. Among shootings that did not involve group members, the most common motives were personal disputes (24.44%) followed by domestic violence (17.78%) (Table 5).

*Table 5. Nonfatal Shooting Circumstances and Group Involvement*

Circumstance	Group Involved		Total	
	N	%	N	%
Domestic Violence	2	3.45%	13	7.78%
Drug Robbery	1	1.72%	3	1.80%
Drug-Related Dispute	2	3.45%	11	6.59%
Instant Dispute	2	3.45%	16	9.58%
Internal Group Conflict	2	3.45%	2	1.20%
Ongoing Group Conflict	19	32.76%	24	14.37%
Other	1	1.72%	2	1.20%
Personal Dispute	10	17.24%	35	20.96%
Retaliation/Revenge	3	5.17%	6	3.59%
Robbery	5	8.62%	12	7.19%
Unknown	11	18.97%	38	22.75%
Self-Inflicted	-	-	5	2.99%
Total	58	34.73%	167	100.00%

### High-Risk Groups and Networks

While there was overlap between the groups identified by detectives and those identified by crime analysts and officers in proactive police units, detectives were notably less familiar with specific crews and their dynamics compared to the broader umbrella groups.

Officers identified four primary groups linked to victims and/or suspects of homicides and nonfatal shootings. Most of these larger groups consisted of four to five smaller crews. In addition, several motorcycle crews emerged as sources of violence and disorder, though they were only occasionally implicated in shootings and remained largely separate from other groups. Several officers described Knoxville's groups as a hybrid between traditional hierarchical gangs and more informal, neighborhood-based crews.

### Key Takeaways and Findings

In April 2025, NICJR conducted four focus groups with KPD personnel, including officers from the Organized Crime Unit, Community Engagement Response Team, and all three geographic districts. Approximately 40 KPD officers participated in the focus group sessions.

When asked what the primary drivers of gun violence are in Knoxville and in their specific precincts, there was considerable alignment. The most prevalent responses included:

- Gang-related conflict
- Social media-inflamed conflicts, such as rap beefs

- Robberies involving drugs and money related to drugs
- Violence around selling and trafficking guns, including Glock switches
- Public housing redevelopment efforts, which have moved residents (including gang-involved individuals) to new neighborhoods, sometimes into rival territory
- Break-ins of cars with guns in them and those guns being used in crimes in other states

When asked what percentage of shootings were perpetrated by individuals who are part of groups, gangs, or neighborhood crews (regardless of shooting motive), KPD personnel across the city said, at minimum, 65% and as high as 90% of shooters were in or associated with groups/gangs. KPD officers identified more than 20 specific individuals who are the primary drivers of gun violence in Knoxville; almost all of these individuals were identified by multiple units.

### Data and Methodology

Quantitative data for this analysis were collected from KPD and the Tennessee Department of Corrections (TDOC). KPD provided data on all homicides and nonfatal injury shootings in Knoxville from January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2024, as well as data on demographic characteristics and prior arrests for suspects and victims of those shootings. KPD and TDOC provided additional data on criminal justice system contact for these individuals.

Variations in data availability contributed to differences in sample sizes across the analyses. Qualitative data were collected via interviews with KPD detectives and focus groups with officers from the Organized Crime Unit, Community Engagement Response Team, and all three geographic districts.

Focus groups were particularly effective in generating information about group involvement and the dynamics that shape those relationships, while interviews offered detailed, person-level information with group involvement. Detectives were available for interviews regarding 95.18% of homicides (n=77) and 89.82% (n=150) of nonfatal shootings. Data on group involvement and circumstances are only included for incidents about which detectives were interviewed.

### Summary Findings

Victims and suspects of homicides and nonfatal shootings in Knoxville have similar characteristics and risk factors. Overwhelmingly, those involved in gun violence are young Black men, aged 18–34, with significant criminal justice history, and often connected to groups or gangs. Group and gang dynamics drive a significant proportion of gun violence, with most shootings tied to ongoing group conflict. Personal disputes and domestic violence were other common reasons for homicides and shootings.

It is important to note, however, that there were more differences between victims and suspects than is typically observed, particularly in terms of whether they had prior criminal histories and involvement in violent offenses. This divergence may be related to the higher prevalence of domestic violence-related homicides and shootings in Knoxville, which shapes the profile of victims and suspects in distinct ways.

Between 2020–2023, there was an average of 33.75 homicides per year in Knoxville. Based on what was learned from this analysis as well as what is known from many other cities, NICJR is confident that approximately 65–70% of people associated with shooting incidents are identifiable as being at very high risk prior to the shooting incident. Especially with homicide suspects, given that 73% of them had arrests prior to the homicide incident and 63% of them had prior arrests for violent offenses.

Knoxville launched a strategy to reduce gun violence in early 2023 that has contributed to the city's decline in violence. The City should continue and expand that strategy in order to achieve ongoing reductions in gun violence.