

Memphis, Tennessee

GUN VIOLENCE

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Summary Report | July 2022 – June 2024



Memphis Gun Violence Problem Analysis Summary Report

In partnership with the City of Memphis, the Memphis Police Department (MPD), and Youth Villages, the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) conducted this detailed analysis of shootings and homicides in Memphis, Tennessee. 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.

The homicide rate in Memphis has remained about five times higher than both the national and statewide rates since 2013 (Figure 2). The average homicide rate in Memphis from 2010–2023 was 36.2 per 100,000 residents, while the national homicide rate during the same period was 5.5 per 100,000 people, and the rate across Tennessee was 7.41 per 100,000 people. Like most US cities, Memphis experienced an increase in violence with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast to most other cities, however, Memphis’s homicide rate has not consistently declined in recent years; after a decline in 2022, the city’s number and rate of homicides spiked again in 2023 (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1. Memphis Annual Homicides, 2011–2023

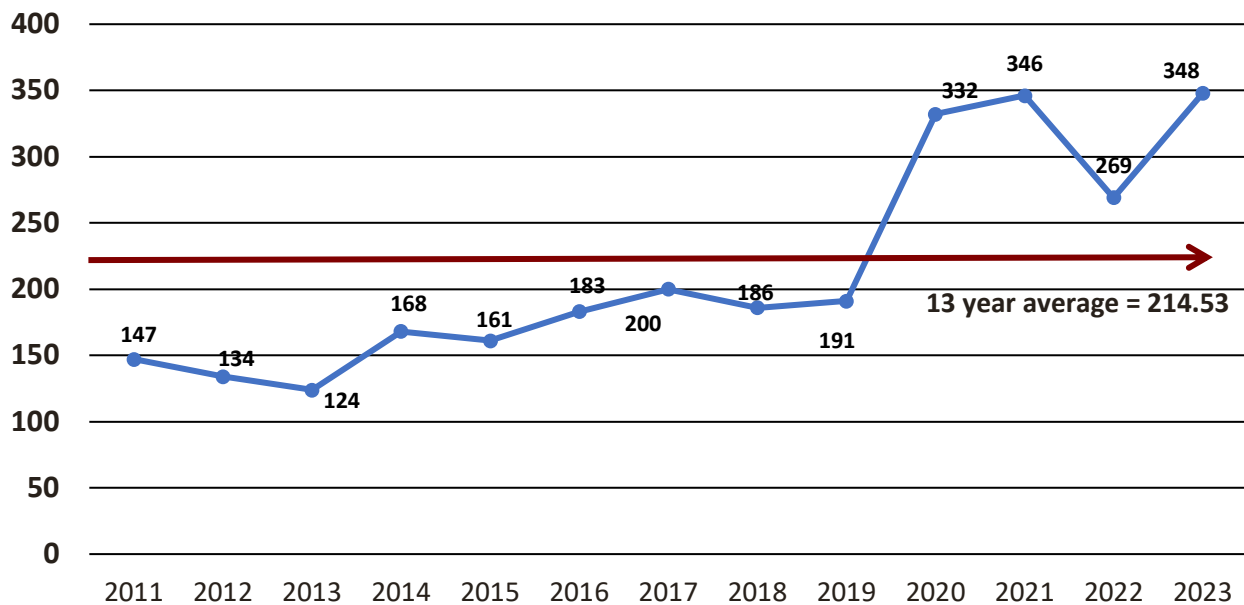
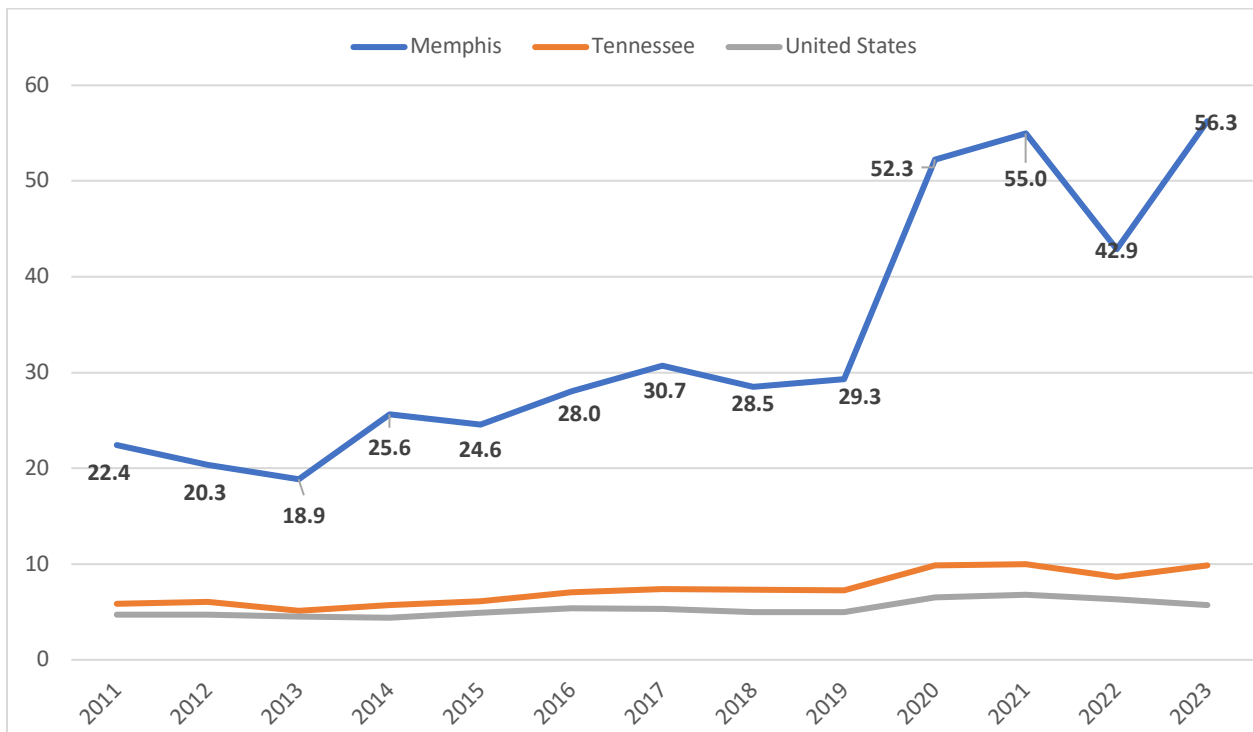


Figure 2. Homicide Rate per 100,000 Residents, 2011-2023



This analysis examined all firearm homicides in Memphis across the two years between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2024 (n=603), as well as all nonfatal injury shootings over the 11 months between September 1, 2023, and July 30, 2024 (n=878). The 603 homicides involved 603 unique victims and 287 identified suspects, and the 878 nonfatal shooting incidents involved 1,030 unique identified victims and 356 suspects. This analysis examines the characteristics of these incidents and the individuals involved, including demographics and criminal justice system involvement. This analysis also includes information on groups and social networks at high risk of involvement in violence and the spatial concentration of violence throughout the city.

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:** 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 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 Memphis are primarily men between the ages of 18–34 (Tables 1–3). For homicides, the average age of suspects and victims is 30.77, and 56.58% are between the ages of 18–34 (Table 1); in addition, 87.05% are male, and 89.32% are Black. For nonfatal shootings, the average age of suspects and victims is 29.43, and 59.04% are between the ages of 18–34 (Table 1). They are also primarily male (81.38%) and Black (91.01%) (Table 2-3). While Memphis does have a majority Black population (62.9%), 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: Age¹

Age Range	Homicides			Nonfatal Shootings		
	Suspects (n=284)	Victims (n=598)	Victims & Suspects (n=882)	Suspects (n=338)	Victims (n=1,022)	Victims & Suspects (n=1,360)
17 and under	12.06%	10.39%	10.88%	12.46%	11.97%	12.06%
18-24	34.40%	25.29%	28.12%	36.80%	28.26%	30.29%
25-34	28.72%	28.48%	28.46%	28.49%	28.95%	28.75%
35-44	17.38%	20.10%	19.16%	12.17%	17.66%	16.25%
45-54	3.90%	8.04%	6.69%	5.64%	7.95%	7.35%
55 and older	3.55%	7.71%	6.35%	4.45%	5.20%	5.00%
Mean Age	28.2	31.99	30.77	28.25	29.82	29.43

¹ Variations in data availability contributed to differences in sample sizes across the analyses.

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

Sex	Homicides			Nonfatal Shootings			Memphis Population
	Suspects (n=282)	Victims (n=598)	Victims & Suspects (n=880)	Suspects (n=355)	Victims (n=1,025)	Victims & Suspects (n=1,380)	
Female	8.51%	15.05%	12.95%	14.96%	19.79%	18.62%	52.5%
Male	91.49%	84.95%	87.05%	83.38%	80.12%	81.38%	47.5%

Table 3. Homicide and Nonfatal Shooting Suspects and Victims: Race

Race	Homicides			Nonfatal Shootings			Memphis Population
	Suspects (n=282)	Victims (n=598)	Victims & Suspects (n=880)	Suspects (n=355)	Victims (n=1,026)	Victims & Suspects (n=1,381)	
Asian	-	-	-	0.28%	0.49%	0.43%	1.7%
Black	92.55%	87.79%	89.32%	93.89%	89.47%	91.01%	62.9%
Latino	3.90%	5.85%	5.23%	1.67%	4.68%	3.91%	10.2%
Other	-	0.67%	0.45%	-	0.10%	0.07%	-
White	3.55%	5.69%	5.00%	2.78%	5.26%	4.64%	25.0%

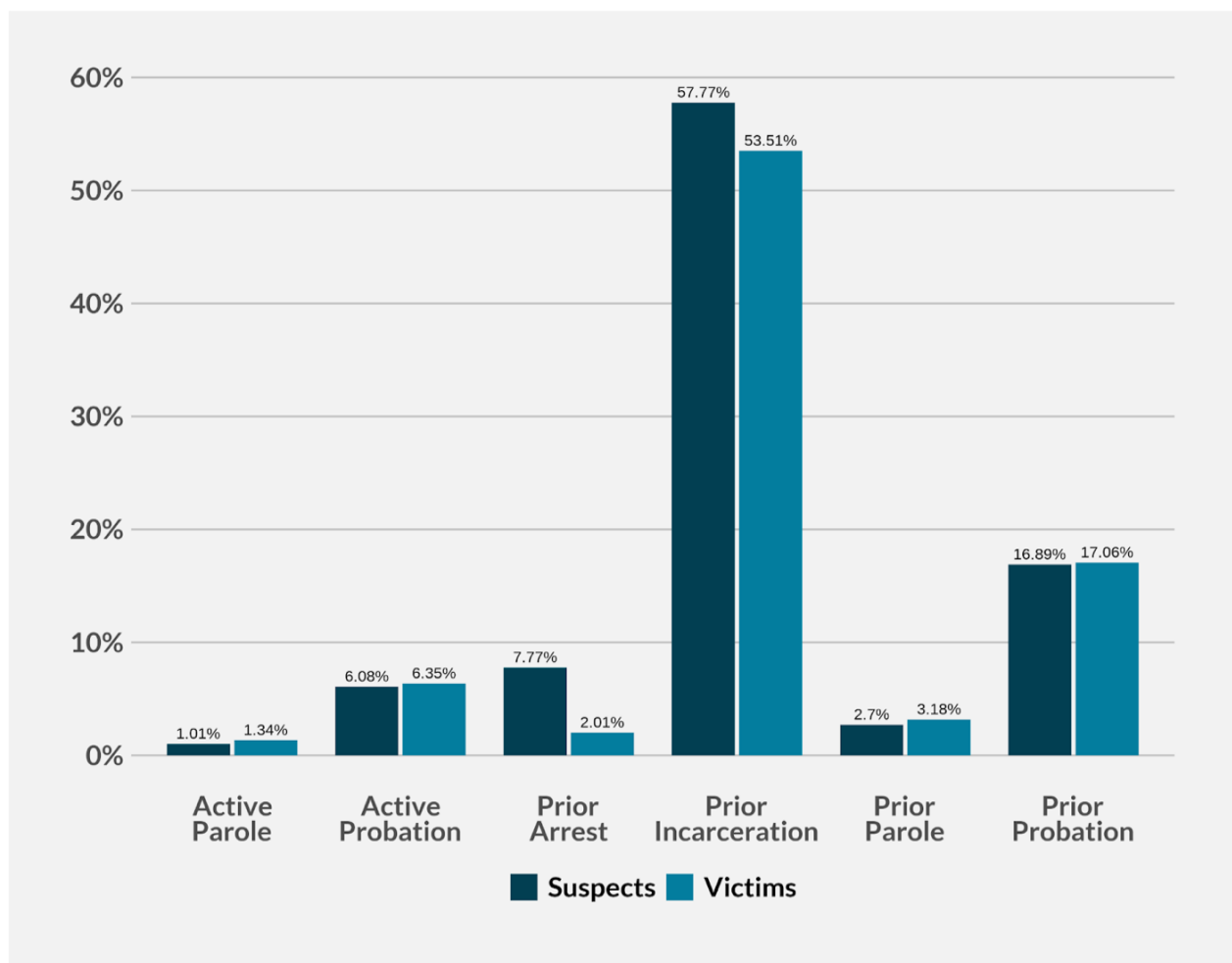
Criminal Justice Involvement

Data from MPD on prior arrests of individuals involved in recent shootings were extremely limited. In addition, these data were only provided from 2018. According to MPD data, only 82 of the more than 2,200 people who were involved in nonfatal shootings or firearm homicides between July 2022 and June 2024 had been previously arrested. By contrast, data from the Tennessee Department of Corrections (TDOC) showed that at least 1,312 people had been previously incarcerated, with several hundred more having been on probation or parole supervision, evidencing clear gaps in MPD’s data. These data limitations indicate a critical need for improved crime analytics in MPD to support targeted crime reduction strategies. As such, all analyses of prior arrest data should be interpreted with caution and not viewed as complete.

With this important caveat, 180 homicide suspects (62.72%) and 320 homicide victims (53.07%) were found to have had prior criminal justice system involvement. A total of 57.77% of homicide suspects and 53.51% of homicide victims had previously been incarcerated, 16.89% of homicide suspects and 17.06% of homicide victims had previously been on probation supervision (these are much smaller percentages than NICJR has seen in other jurisdictions), 7.09% of homicide suspects and 7.69% of homicide victims were on active probation or parole supervision at the time of the homicide. Among those individuals with a known prior MPD arrest, the majority (60.87% of homicide suspects and 75.00% of victims) had prior arrests for violent offenses.

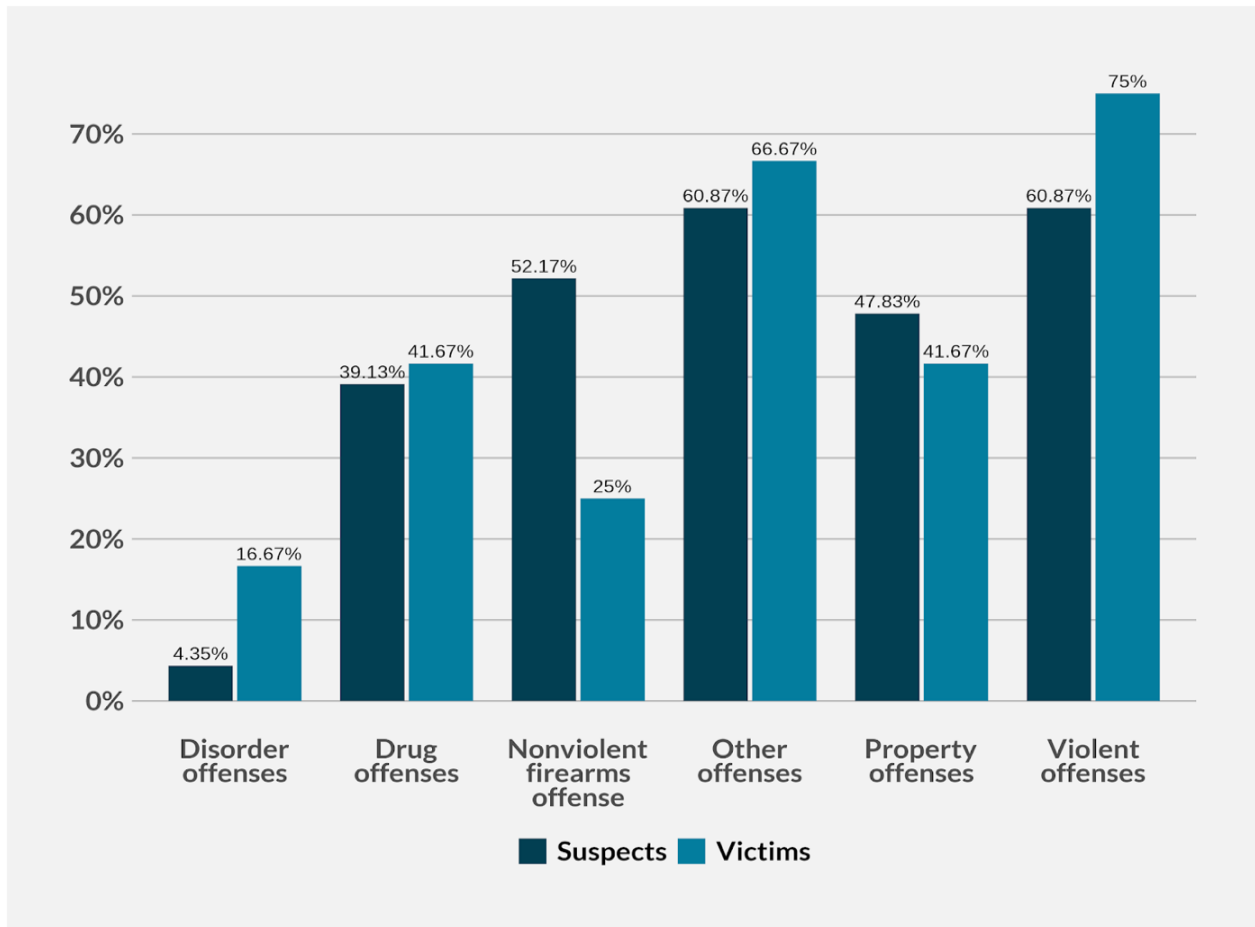
In addition, 191 nonfatal shooting suspects (53.56%) and 572 nonfatal shooting victims (55.53%) had prior criminal justice system involvement. A total of 50.97% of nonfatal shooting suspects and 54.09% of nonfatal shooting victims had previously been incarcerated, while 14.76% of nonfatal shooting suspects and 17.64% of nonfatal shooting victims had previously been on probation. Additionally, 6.69% of nonfatal shooting suspects and 7.70% of nonfatal shooting victims were on active probation or parole supervision at the time of the incident. Among those individuals with a known prior MPD arrest, the majority of nonfatal shooting suspects (61.54%) and 42.86% of victims had prior arrests for violent offenses.

Figure 3. Prior Criminal Justice System Involvement of Homicide Suspects and Victims²



² These prior arrest data should be interpreted with caution, given limitations in MPD data. It is extremely unlikely that more than half of the people involved in shootings in Memphis had previously been incarcerated but fewer than 10% of those same people had been arrested by MPD.

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



Victims and suspects were similar in terms of the average number and type of prior criminal offenses, except for disorder offenses and nonviolent firearm offenses. Among those who were known to the criminal justice system prior to the homicide, most victims and suspects had been arrested for violent cases, other offenses, and property offenses.

Repeat Involvement

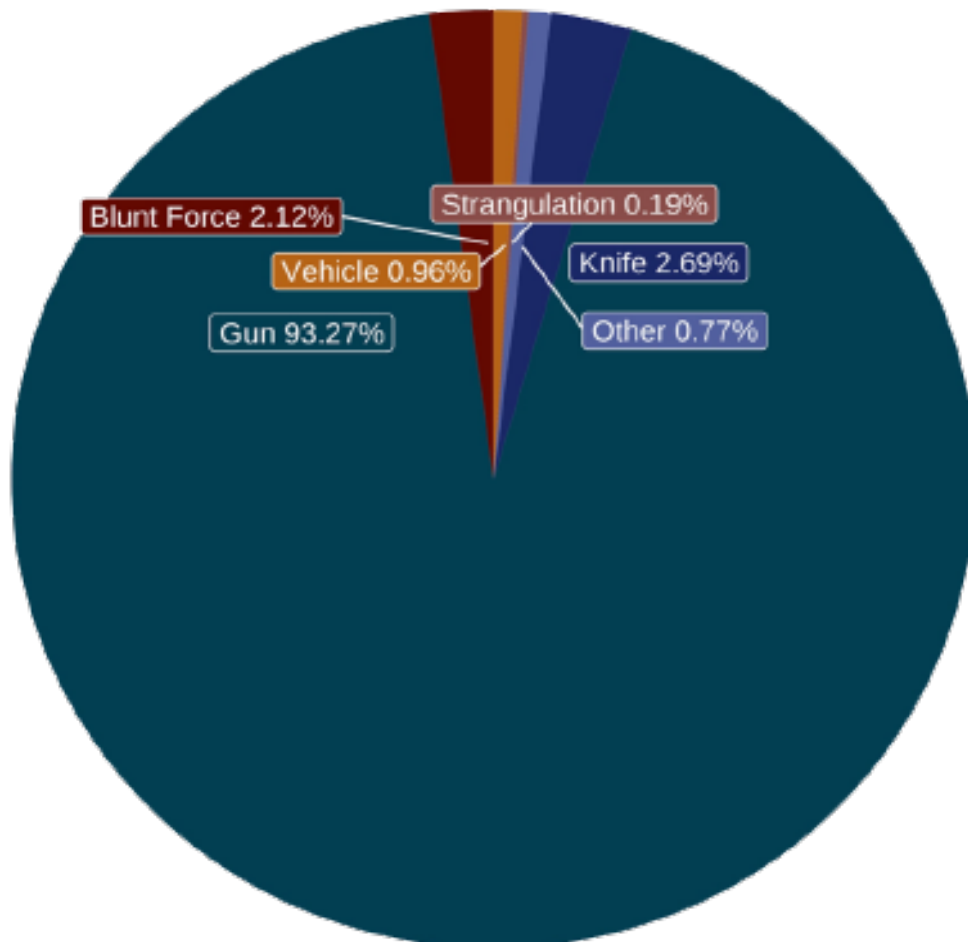
During the study period, 67 individuals were involved in multiple shootings, including 57 individuals who were involved in two shootings and 10 who were involved in three shootings. All 67 individuals were Black, and 60 (89.6%) of them were male. At the time of the first shooting, 37 of the individuals (55.2%) were 18–34 years old, 17 individuals (25.4%) were older than 35, and 12 (17.9%) of them were under 18 years old. Half of the people involved in three shootings were 18–24 years old at that time.

Incident Analysis

Homicides

This analysis examined all firearm homicides in Memphis from July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2024 (n =603). The vast majority (93.27%) of all homicides during that period involved a gun (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Homicides, Broken Down by Weapons and Causes



For homicides in which investigators had any knowledge about gang or group dynamics, 57.6% 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 and retaliation. Personal disputes were the most common reason for homicides that did not involve group members (Table 4).

Table 4. Homicide Circumstances and Group Involvement

Circumstance	Total		Group-Involved		Not Group-Involved	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Domestic violence	20	10.87%	1	0.94%	19	24.36%
Drug robbery	3	1.63%	-	-	3	3.85%
Drug-related dispute	3	1.63%	1	0.94%	2	2.56%
Instant dispute	19	10.33%	10	9.43%	9	11.54%
Internal group conflict	7	3.80%	7	6.60%	-	-
Ongoing group conflict	65	35.33%	65	61.32%	-	-
Other	11	5.98%	1	0.94%	10	12.82%
Personal dispute	28	15.22%	7	6.60%	21	26.92%
Retaliation/Revenge	7	3.80%	4	3.77%	3	3.85%
Robbery	17	9.24%	8	7.55%	9	11.54%
Unknown	4	2.17%	2	1.89%	2	2.56%
Total	184	100.00%	106	100.00%	78	100.00%

Nonfatal Shootings

Dynamics were similar for nonfatal shootings: 86.42% of shooting incidents in which investigators 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, almost all (91.78%) were tied to ongoing group conflicts. Among shootings that did not involve group members, the most common motives were personal disputes (39.13%) followed by instant disputes (30.43%) (Table 5).

Table 5. Nonfatal Shooting Circumstances and Group Involvement

Circumstance	Total		Group-Involved		Not Group-Involved	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Domestic violence	1	1.04%	-	-	1	4.35%
Drug-related dispute	1	1.04%	-	-	1	4.35%
Instant dispute	8	8.33%	1	1.37%	7	30.43%
Ongoing group conflict	67	69.79%	67	91.78%	-	-
Other	3	3.12%	1	1.37%	2	8.70%
Personal dispute	9	9.38%	-	-	9	39.13%
Retaliation/Revenge	2	2.08%	2	2.74%	-	-
Robbery	3	3.12%	2	2.74%	1	4.35%
Unknown	2	2.08%	-	-	2	8.70%
Total	96	100.00%	73	100.00%	23	100.00%

High-Risk Groups and Networks

There was some overlap in groups identified by detectives and groups identified by crime analysts and precinct-based task force officers; however, there also was notable variation, indicating a need for better intelligence gathering and sharing.

Investigators identified nearly 50 groups that victims and/or suspects of homicides and nonfatal shootings were associated with during the study period. Of those, 21 groups were involved in two or more shootings/homicides, and four groups were involved in 10 or more shootings/homicides. Precinct level task force officers and crime analysts identified 22 active groups across the city. Several investigators described Memphis’ groups as a hybrid between traditional hierarchical gangs and more informal, neighborhood-based crews. Group “turfs” were noted to be unstable and dynamic, with associated members frequently crossing neighborhoods and sometimes holding fluid associations with multiple groups.

Key Takeaways and Findings

In November 2024, NICJR conducted nine focus groups with MPD personnel, including task force members, staff from the General Investigation Bureau, and leadership from eight precincts and three citywide investigation and enforcement units. More than 100 officers participated in the focus group sessions. In addition to MPD officers, NICJR interviewed staff at several community violence intervention organizations, who expressed perspectives similar to what was shared by law enforcement officers.

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

- gangs, especially relatively new hybrid gangs
- social media, especially drill rap videos posted on social media that create or exacerbate group conflicts
- fighting over women
- feelings of impunity (the perceived lack of prosecution and accountability, especially of juveniles)
- proliferation of firearms / easy access to guns, especially since a new state law allowing no-permit carry went into effect
- retaliatory cycles of gun violence
- poverty and lack of quality education
- car break-ins where guns are stolen from vehicles and later used in shootings (see Table 6 below)
- cascading violence associated with the Young Dolph murder

Table 6. Frequency of Firearm Thefts from Motor Vehicles (TFMV), July 2022 - June 2024

Guns Stolen	July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023	July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024	July 1, 2022-June 30, 2024
TFMV	2,379	1,833	4,212
Total	4,052	3,335	7,387
Percentage	58.71%	54.96%	57.02%

When asked what percentage of shootings were perpetrated by individuals who are part of groups, gangs, or neighborhood crews (regardless of shooting motive), MPD personnel across the city said at minimum 65% and as high as 90% of shooters were in or associated with groups/gangs.

Among interviewees, there was nearly unanimous agreement on the one of primary drivers of gun violence in the city: There is a deadly mix of group/crew/gang members making music videos taunting or disrespecting their rivals that are posted on social media, and those videos spark or further inflame neighborhood conflicts that escalate into shootings. While the music videos themselves were identified as the primary issue, other comments and pictures posted to social media by group members also lead to shootings. While the music videos themselves were identified as the primary issue, other comments and pictures posted to social media by group members also lead to shootings.

Poverty

Although this analysis is focused on understanding the near-term drivers of gun violence, it should be acknowledged that the striking levels of poverty in Memphis do have profound impacts on violence. In 2023, the poverty rate in Memphis was 22.6%—well above the national average of 12.8% and the Tennessee average of 14.0%. Among Black Memphis residents, the poverty rate is 27.1%, and among Black children, the poverty rate is 43.0%.³ Poverty, substandard education, generational trauma, lack of resources, and neighborhood dysfunction are all significant root causes of violence.

Officers from nearly all of the precincts as well as community violence intervention workers identified poverty as a primary driver of violence in Memphis. Issues such as lack of stable housing, food insecurity, and inadequate transportation options were frequently cited as contributing to both violence and broader criminal activity across the city. One significant concern is the high rate of car theft, which officers noted is partly fueled by limited access to reliable public transportation. Stolen vehicles are commonly used for personal transportation or resold for financial gain, further linking economic hardship to patterns of crime.

Clearance Rates

In December 2024, the federal Department of Justice released a report on its detailed investigation into the operations of MPD following the killing of Tyre Nichols at the hands of MPD officers. The DOJ report stated:

MPD has struggled to solve violent crimes, such as murders and non-fatal shootings. According to data submitted by MPD to the FBI, MPD arrested a suspect in just 28 percent of murders in 2022 and 14 percent of murders in 2023 — far below the national rate of 50 percent. MPD recently created a Gun Crimes Unit to investigate non-fatal shootings. In 2023, that unit investigated more than 2,100 non-fatal shootings and made an arrest in 276 cases, a clearance rate of 13 percent. A 2018 report by the National Public Safety Partnership found that caseloads for MPD’s homicide investigators were “unsustainable.” According to local prosecutors, MPD has skilled and dedicated investigators, but there are gaps in case files they receive, which they attribute to excessive caseloads and inexperience.

³ University of Memphis, School of Social Work & GMBS Consulting. (2024). *Memphis Poverty Fact Sheet 2024*. <https://www.memphis.edu/socialwork/research/2024-poverty-fact-sheet-final.pdf>

Data and Methodology

Quantitative data for this analysis was collected from MPD and TDOC. MPD provided data on all homicides in Memphis from July 2022-June 2024 and all nonfatal injury shootings from September 2023-July 2024, as well as data on demographic characteristics and prior arrests for suspects and victims of those shootings. MPD 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. Quantitative data provided by the MPD were extremely limited; a spreadsheet provided by MPD served as a reference point but lacked consistent or complete entries for many individuals. To supplement missing information and clarify any inconsistencies, qualitative data were collected via interviews with MPD investigators and focus groups with crime analysts, precinct-based patrol officers, sergeants, and lieutenants.

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. Investigators were available for interviews regarding 77.94% of homicides (n=470) and 66.40% (n=583) of nonfatal shootings. Data on group involvement and circumstances are only included for incidents in which investigators were interviewed.

The variation in data sources and gaps within collected data highlight the need for standardized data collection practices, and further analyses of shooting victims' and suspects' prior criminal histories should be prioritized to facilitate a more thorough understanding of local violence dynamics.

Summary Findings

Victims and suspects of homicides and nonfatal shootings in Memphis have very similar characteristics and risk factors. Overwhelmingly, those involved in gun violence are young Black men, aged 18–34. More than half of all victims and suspects of homicides and nonfatal shootings have been previously incarcerated, and most have been arrested for violent offenses prior to a shooting incident. Many of these individuals are associated with groups or gangs. Group and gang dynamics drive a significant proportion of gun violence, with most shootings tied to ongoing group conflict. Personal conflicts and instant disputes that rapidly escalate to shootings are also common.

NICJR was not able to access data on the previous victimization of those involved in gun violence in Memphis; however, national research shows that a substantial percentage of shooting suspects and victims have previous victimization. Given the city's high volume of nonfatal shootings, it is very likely that having previously been wounded in a shooting is another common characteristic of those who are at the highest risk of gun violence in Memphis.

Between 2020-2023, there was an average of 323 homicides in Memphis along with more than 1,000 nonfatal shooting incidents. The number of individuals associated with those incidents is not simple to calculate. Some of the suspects later become victims, and some of the victims later become suspects. Some incidents have one shooter with several victims, and other incidents have several shooters with one victim. 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. This means that among the more than 1,300 people who commit shootings in Memphis each year, at least 845 of them could be identified and potentially intervened with to prevent the shooting.

The violence reduction initiative being developed in Memphis could focus intensive interventions on these 845 people, which would significantly impact near-term violence rates and save lives.