

Good morning. We look at where most of America's gun violence happens.
German Lopez & Ashley Wu - The Morning

Since a gunman killed seven people at a Chicago suburb's July 4 parade, [more than 160 people](#) have died from other gun homicides across the country. In Chicago alone, [at least 10 people were killed](#) in multiple shootings during the holiday weekend.

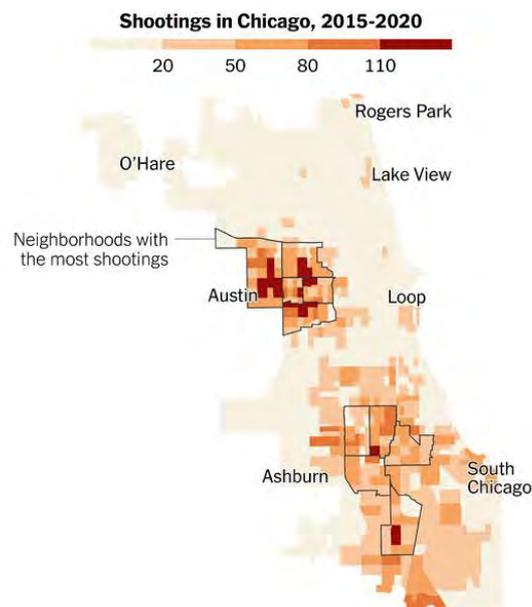
These everyday killings received far less attention than the mass murder at the parade. But they are the standard for American gun violence: More than 95 percent of gun homicides this year have been shootings with one to three victims.

Today, we want to help you understand where and why most everyday gun violence happens. We're going to focus on Chicago, because it has one of the country's highest murder rates and because a local group — the University of Chicago Crime Lab — keeps detailed data. But the trends in Chicago are also present in many other places.

One crucial point is that violence tends to be highly concentrated: A small sliver of blocks — just 4 percent in Chicago, for example — can account for a majority of shootings in a city or a county.

Many of the people in these blocks live in terror. The sound of gunshots is common, sometimes coming multiple times a day. Parents worry that their kids could be next, and young people fear for their own lives. As Jomarria Vaughn, a 24-year-old Chicagoan, [told this newsletter](#): "I'm scared. I have my guard up all day."

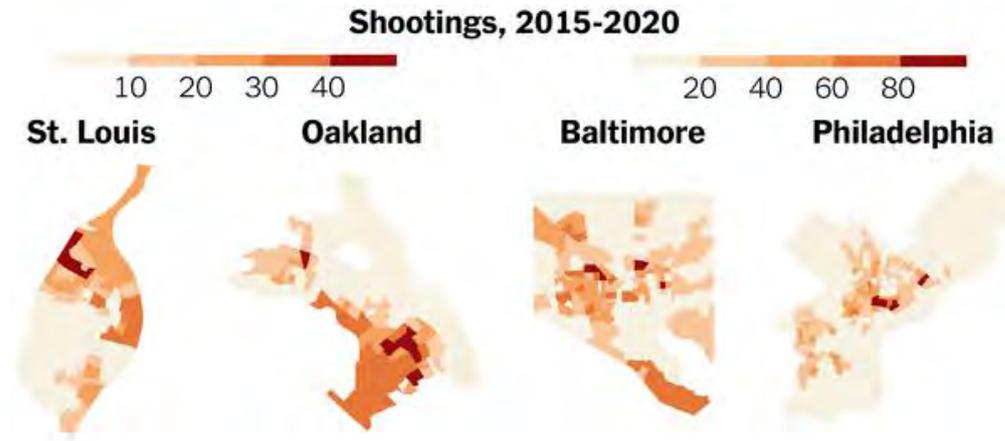
This map of shootings in Chicago shows the concentration. Shootings are rare in much of the city, particularly on the wealthier North Side, but not on the poorer West and South Sides.



Source: University of Chicago Crime Lab

This concentration is not exclusive to Chicago. Across the U.S., neighborhoods that contained just 1.5 percent of the population accounted for 26 percent of gun homicides, [a 2017 analysis by The Guardian found](#).

Here is a look at four other cities, with data provided by the Princeton University researchers Alisabeth Marsteller and Patrick Sharkey:

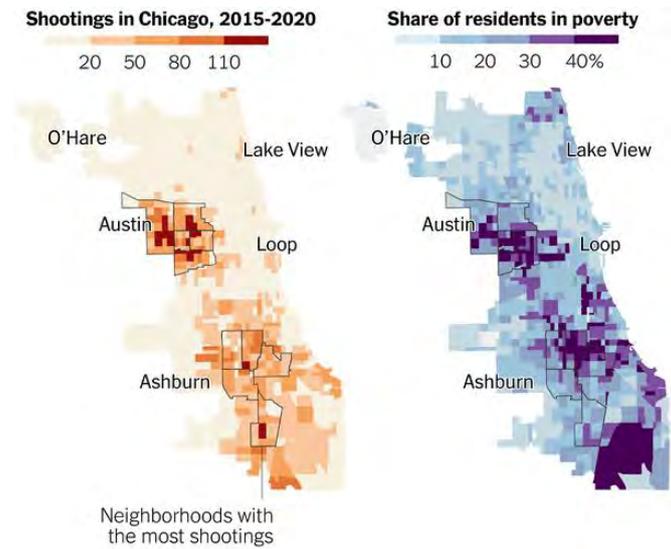


Sources: Alisabeth Marsteller & Patrick Sharkey, Princeton University; Gun Violence Archive

Poverty and violence

There are several factors behind the concentration of violence. A major one is poverty.

In Chicago, violence and poverty closely overlap, as these maps demonstrate:



Poverty data from 2015 to 2019; grey regions are missing data. | Sources: University of Chicago Crime Lab; Chicago Health Atlas

Experts have long debated why violence and poverty are linked. Is it something specific to poverty, such as insufficient housing or jobs? Is it the environment that poverty fosters, in which people are stressed and desperate — and more likely to act out?

One theory, *cited* by Sharkey, blames the breakdown of “*collective efficacy*.” That might sound academic, but the concept is straightforward: When society’s institutions have unraveled, people feel that they are on their own. They are then less likely to watch over one another or come together to address common interests.

By reducing social trust, concentrated poverty hurts communities’ ability to enforce norms against violent behavior. And when people are left unchecked and feel they have nothing to lose, they are more likely to take extreme measures, such as violence, to solve their problems.

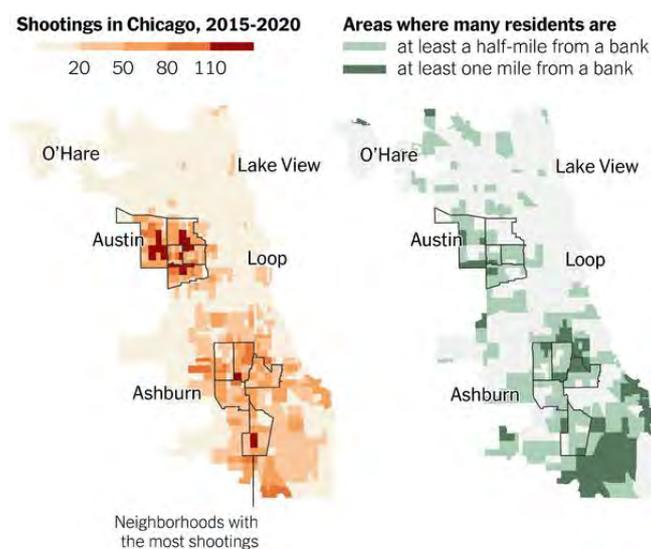
The past few years may help you understand this dynamic even if you’re not poor. Many Americans felt a hit to their own collective efficacy because of the Covid pandemic, George Floyd’s murder and its aftermath, and the polarized political atmosphere. Sure enough, murders and other violent crimes *increased* during this period.

A spiral downward

It is difficult to talk about gun violence without talking about race, because Black Americans are most likely to be the victims of shootings. Poverty explains part of the disparity, since Black people are *more likely to be poor*. But individual poverty is not the full explanation.

Black Americans are also less likely to live in communities with strong institutional support. Exclusionary housing policies and discrimination have pushed Black Americans into segregated neighborhoods. Both governments and the private sector then neglected these neighborhoods, leaving people without good schools, banks, grocery stores and institutions.

This kind of economic neglect, which experts refer to as *disinvestment*, fosters violence. These maps show the correlation in Chicago between shootings and a lack of banks:



“Many” represents at least a third of the population. | Sources: University of Chicago Crime Lab; Bank Branch Locator

The relationship also goes the other way, Roseanna Ander, executive director of the Crime Lab, told us: Violence can perpetuate disinvestment. Business owners do not want their shops, restaurants and warehouses in violent neighborhoods. People do not want to live in places where gunshots are fired daily. And governments shift resources away from places that officials deem lost causes. It is a vicious cycle.

A greater understanding of this spiral in recent years has driven activists and policymakers to address not just violence itself but its root causes, too. The Chicago mayor's office told us it had adopted a broader approach to combating violence, focused on boosting businesses, local clubs, mental health care and other social supports, on top of traditional policing work. As this newsletter has explained before, most experts support an all-of-the-above strategy to crime, involving [both the police and alternative approaches](#).

But this work is difficult and, even if it succeeds, takes money and time — years or decades to rebuild long-neglected communities. Until then, the people in these neighborhoods will likely suffer the worst of American gun violence.