

Research Brief
Mississippi Urban Research Center
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An Update on Homicide Rates and Other Gun Violence-Related
Issues in Mississippi and the City of Jackson

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Abstract

This research brief examined recent patterns in homicide and firearm-related violence in Mississippi, with particular emphasis on the City of Jackson. Utilizing data and information from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) *Crime Data Explorer* dataset, Clarion Ledger newspaper reporting, and Mississippi Urban Research Center (MURC) analyses, this brief documents an uneven decline in homicides following COVID-19 pandemic surges. Between 2018 and 2024, Jackson experienced historically high homicide levels that peaked in 2021, but have gradually fallen since 2022. This study's findings indicated firearms, especially handguns, remain the dominant weapon category, accounting for roughly 70 percent of all homicides statewide. Other significant findings identified social and technological influences, including the spread of criminal trends through social-media platforms, as emerging risk factors. This brief also found inconsistent reporting of crime to the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), highlighting how incomplete datasets distort both public perception and evidence-based policymaking regarding crime-related issues. Overall, this brief's findings underscore the need for comprehensive data reporting, targeted firearm and social media policy reforms, and continued community-based violence-reduction initiatives to lower homicide rates locally, statewide, and nationally.

Introduction

Gun violence continues to pose a major threat to public safety and community well-being across the United States (Diaz, 2023; John Hopkins, 2022). In Mississippi and particularly within the City of Jackson, the issue has taken on an urgent call-to-action. Despite national downward trends in violent crime reported in 2023, Jackson's homicide rate has remained markedly higher than both state and national averages (Dankins & Drape, 2025). Policymakers, researchers, and community organizations have sought to understand the causes of Jackson's higher homicide rates, including the combined impact of firearm accessibility, economic strain, and uneven data transparency on those rates.

This research brief extends prior analyses conducted by the Mississippi Urban Research Center (O'Quinn & Mozee, 2022; Kelley & Mozee, 2025), and provides a current statistical and interpretive update of homicide rates in the City of Jackson and the state of Mississippi. It integrates publicly available data sources with locally reported information to present a holistic view of homicide and firearm-violence trends from 2018 through 2025. Particular attention is

given to the reliability of crime data reporting, the predominance of firearm use in homicides, and social factors that may influence criminal behavior (e.g., the role of social media).

Background and Problem

Between 2018 and 2019, the City of Jackson reported relatively stable homicide frequencies, averaging fewer than 100 victims annually (Dankins & Drape, 2025). Beginning in 2020, however, homicides rose sharply to 133 and reached a record high of 160 in 2021 (O’Quinn, 2022; Dankins, 2025). These increases coincided with the broader national surge in violent crime during the COVID-19 pandemic, when social isolation, economic stress, and disruptions to public services likely exacerbated existing community tensions (Kelley & Mozee, 2025). Although the number of homicides declined in 2022 (138 cases) and again in 2023 (118 cases), the rate has yet to return to pre-pandemic double-digit levels (WLBT, 2025).

Mississippi’s incomplete participation in the FBI’s National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) further complicates statewide and city-level analysis. Approximately 60 percent of Mississippi’s law-enforcement agencies did not submit 12 months of crime data in 2024 (Dankins, 2025). The Jackson Police Department has not provided consistent annual reporting since 2020, creating a significant gap in the official federal record. As a result, researchers must rely on locally sourced data, investigative journalism, and secondary statistical estimates to track homicide and crime trends. These limitations can undermine the accuracy of federal crime metrics, obscure the scale of the problem, and hinder the design of evidence-based interventions.

The convergence of high firearm accessibility, incomplete reporting, and limited policy reform continues to shape Mississippi’s homicide rates. Without improved transparency and standardized data submission, both policymakers and the public remain constrained in their ability to evaluate progress or identify effective solutions. This research brief examined recent patterns in homicide and firearm-related violence in Mississippi, with particular emphasis on the City of Jackson. It seeks to enlighten policymakers and other interested parties on those factors and issues impacting homicide rates locally and statewide. The following sections discuss this study’s research methods and the major findings.

Research Methods

This study utilized a mixed-methods research design integrating quantitative and qualitative data sources. Quantitative analysis drew primarily from the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) *Crime Data Explorer* dataset which provides national and state-level crime statistics through the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) and National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). Supplemental data were obtained from the *Mississippi Clarion Ledger newspaper*, *WLBT News*, and Mississippi Urban Research Center (MURC) research briefs to fill reporting gaps for the City of Jackson, which has not consistently submitted crime data since 2020.

The quantitative component of this study involved the cleaning, categorization, and aggregation of selected data using Microsoft Excel and online statistical programs. Data variables of interest were organized by year, offense type, and weapon category. Homicide and crime rates were calculated per 100,000 residents based on Census estimates. Trend visualizations were created to

highlight year-to-year variation and to compare Mississippi's homicide rates with national averages.

The qualitative component of this study utilized content analysis to examine peer-reviewed studies, news articles, and legislative documents related to gun-violence policy, social-media influence, and local enforcement practices. This triangulated approach increased internal validity and provided a more contextual interpretation of observed trends related to crime and homicide rates impacting the City of Jackson and state of Mississippi.

Findings

An analysis of selected data indicated that homicide frequencies in Jackson have gradually declined since 2022, but remain well above pre-pandemic levels. Tables 1 and 2 summarize annual homicide counts for the City of Jackson. Figure 1 compares Mississippi's statewide rates relative to national trends. Recent homicide data for the City of Jackson revealed a declining pattern, though homicide totals have not yet fallen below triple digits (WLBT, 2025).

Table 1
Homicide Frequency by Year for Jackson, Mississippi

Year	Frequency of Homicides
2018	84
2019	83
2020	133
2021	160
2022	138
2023	118
2024	111

Table 2
Homicide Frequency by Month for Jackson Mississippi (2024 and 2025)

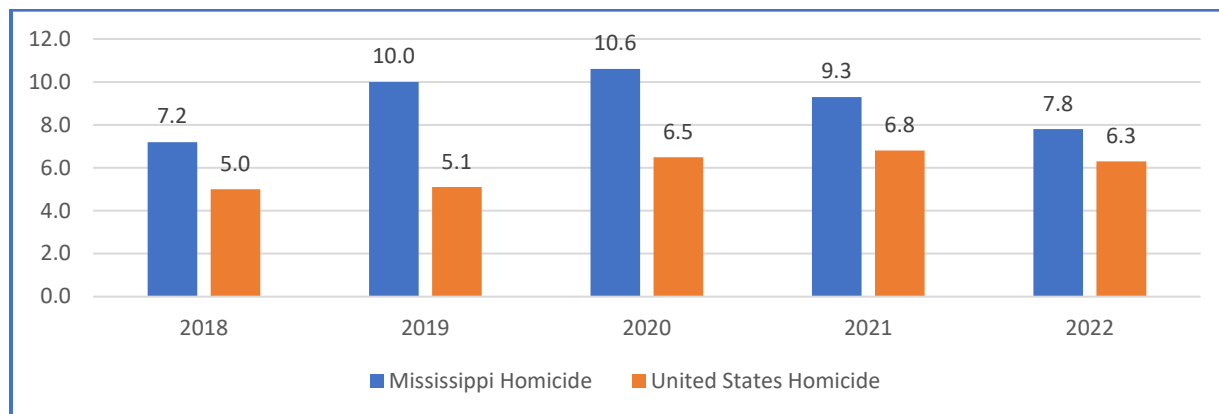
Month	Frequency of Homicides 2025	Frequency of Homicides 2024
January	5	12
February	9	4
March	6	13
April	4	16
May	3	6
June	6	10
July	6	11
August	5	6
January- August Totals	44	78

Source: WLBT, 2025

Recent data for the City of Jackson by Month showed a 43–50% decrease in homicides in 2025 compared to 2024 (Dankins, 2025). Figure 1 illustrates how Mississippi’s homicide rates remain consistently higher than the national per-capita average (FBI, 2024).

Figure 1

*Homicide Rates in the United States and Mississippi, 2018 – 2024**

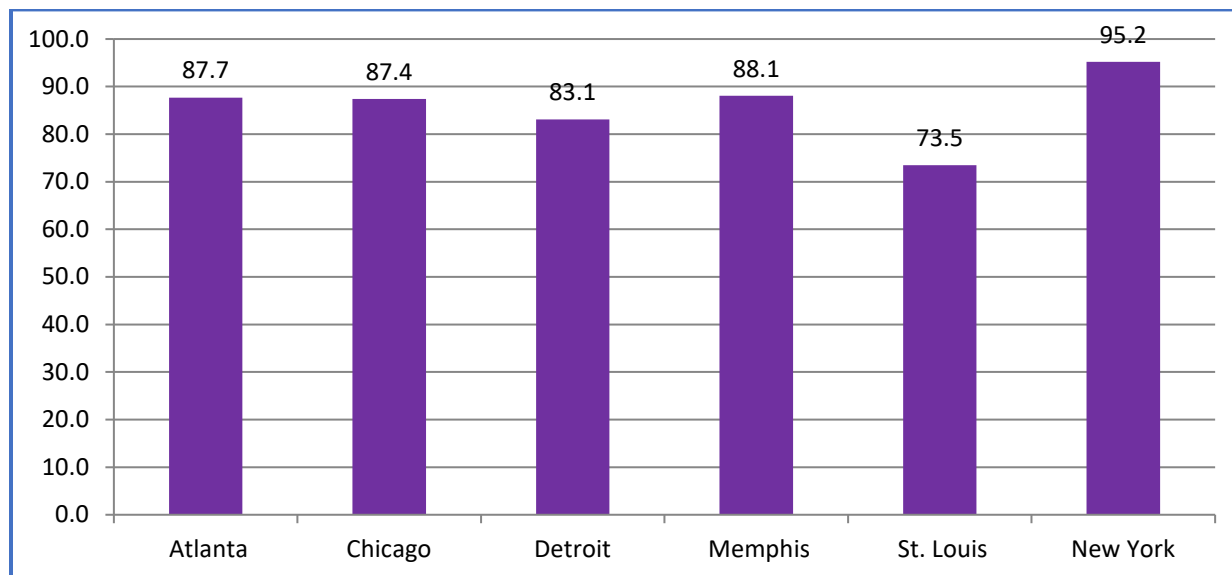


* Per 100,000 population / Source: FBI, Crime Data Explorer, 2024

Figure 2 illustrates how firearms, in particularly handguns, accounted for approximately 70 percent of homicides among member cities of the Black Mayors Crime Coalition (BMCC) (FBI, 2024; Statista, 2023).

Figure 2

*Percentage of Homicides Committed by Firearms in Selected BMCC Cities (2018 – 2022)**



* Per 100,000 population / Source: FBI, Crime Data Explorer, 2024

Trends

Nationally, firearm-related homicides rose sharply during 2020 and 2021, paralleling the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, before beginning a gradual decline. FBI data show that the number of murders in the United States increased 30 percent between 2019 and 2020, the largest single-year jump in modern history (FBI, 2024). The City of Jackson followed this national trend with Jackson's homicides reaching 160 in 2021, the city's highest total on record. Although 2022 brought a modest reduction, homicide levels remained substantially above the 2018–2019 baseline.

Preliminary 2023–2024 data suggest both Mississippi and the City of Jackson have continued to experience incremental improvement, with Jackson reporting 111 homicides in 2024, a decline of roughly 30 percent from the 2021 peak (Dankins, 2025). Early 2025 data compiled by the *Clarion Ledger* indicated an even steeper mid-year decline with 44 homicides through August 2025, compared with 78 during the same period in 2024 (Dankins, 2025). This equates to a 43–50 percent year-to-year reduction, marking the most significant improvement in over five years.

Despite this encouraging pattern, several additional issues need to be considered before any definitive conclusions can be reached. A large portion of Mississippi's law-enforcement agencies, including the Jackson Police Department, failed to report complete data to the NIBRS in 2022 and 2023. Consequently, official FBI statistics may underestimate actual frequencies. Inconsistent crime reporting procedures can hamper cross-jurisdictional comparisons and obscure the magnitude of firearm violence at both local and state levels.

Overall, the data reviewed by this study indicated that while homicides are trending downward in Jackson and Mississippi, structural weaknesses in data reporting and firearm regulation likely remain key factors influencing homicide frequency trends.

Gun Violence Dominates Homicides

Firearms remain the predominant instrument of homicide across the United States and in Mississippi (Statista, 2023). Analysis of national data from 2006 through 2021 shows that, on average, approximately 70 percent of all homicides were committed with a firearm (Statista, 2023). Within this range, state-level variation typically falls between 65 and 80 percent, underscoring the pervasive role of guns, especially handguns, in violent deaths (FBI, 2024; Statista, 2023).

The impact of handguns is so significant that the *International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision* (ICD-10) includes a specific cause-of-death code (i.e., X93, Assault by Handgun Discharge) separate from other firearm categories (Harrison, 1998). The predominance of handgun use in lethal incidents highlights issues related to the accessibility of such weapons and their disproportionate contribution to the nation's homicide rates.

Figure 3

Percentage of Homicides Committed by Firearms, 2018-2022



Source: FBI, Crime Data Explorer

Figure 3 displays the share of homicides attributed to firearms among selected member cities of the Black Mayors Crime Coalition (BMCC). Data averaged across 2018–2022 reveal that firearm involvement typically exceeds 70 percent of total homicides (FBI, 2024; Statista, 2023).

Unreported Data

Incomplete and inconsistent crime reporting remains one of the most serious issues limiting a true determination of gun violence trends in Mississippi. According to the *Clarion Ledger newspaper*, nearly 60 percent of Mississippi law-enforcement agencies did not report complete crime data to the federal National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) during 2024 (Dankins, 2025). The Jackson Police Department, the largest municipal police agency in the state, has not provided full data submissions since 2020 (Li, 2022). As a result, approximately five percent of Mississippi’s population resides in an area without federally reported crime statistics (Li, 2022).

This reporting gap makes it difficult to actually determine true homicide trends at the local and statewide levels. For example, the FBI database indicated a decline in Mississippi homicides during 2021 and 2022; however, the omission of Jackson’s data could account for much of the apparent improvement (Li, 2022). Local journalism sources documented 160 homicides in 2021 (a record high for the City of Jackson), and 135 homicides in 2022 (Dankins & Drape, 2025). When such data are missing from calculating accurate homicide rates, a distorted and/or misleading picture of public safety and weakened accountability mechanisms can emerge.

Unreported data can also complicate academic and policy research. Analysts seeking to evaluate community-policing outcomes or gun-law reforms depend on accurate baseline information. When local agencies opt out of federal reporting systems, policymakers, researchers, and community members cannot accurately measure progress or allocate resources effectively.

Discussion

While homicide rates in Jackson and Mississippi have begun to decline, the persistence of firearm-related violence reveals potential systemic weaknesses in both crime prevention and data collection activities. Studies have linked a significant portion of homicide incidents to legally purchased firearms later reported stolen (Diaz, 2023). In many states, citizens are not required to notify law enforcement when a firearm is stolen, allowing weapons to circulate within illegal markets for possibly years before recovery (Diaz, 2023). Strengthening theft-reporting mandates could help reduce the number of guns later implicated in violent crimes (Diaz, 2023).

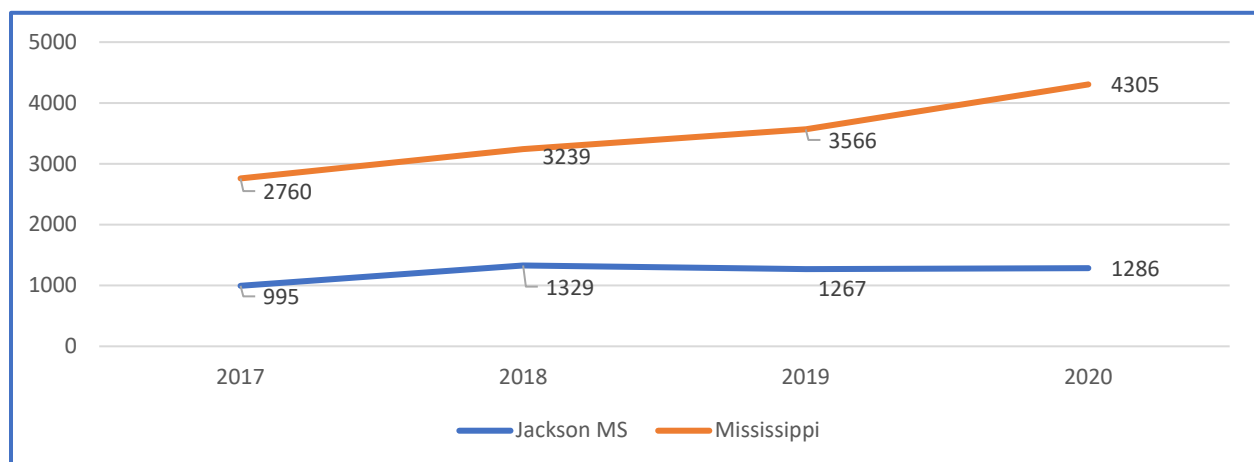
As briefly discussed earlier in this research brief, there are several factors having a potentially significant impact on homicide rates at the local, state, and national levels. For example, socioeconomic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (for example, high levels of unemployment and social isolation) likely contributed to the 2020–2021 spike in violent crime (Bacon, Mozee, Kelley, 2023). Kelley and Mozee (2025) argue that Jackson’s subsequent decline in homicides may be partly attributable to the city’s renewed emphasis on community engagement and its participation in the Black Mayors Crime Coalition (BMCC) (Cooper, 2024). These initiatives reflect a shift toward proactive, community-oriented policing and collective urban-safety planning.

The political environment surrounding gun regulation could also influence local crime patterns. O’Quinn (2022) observed that states with weaker gun laws often experience higher rates of firearm violence. Mississippi ranks among the least restrictive states in this regard. Legislative efforts to strengthen firearm policy such as *House Bill 778* (MS Legislature 2024), which proposed raising the minimum purchase age for assault-style rifles, failed in committee.

Another potential factor involves the role of social media in shaping crime trends and public perception. Platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and Snapchat can amplify the visibility of criminal acts and, in some cases, facilitate imitation or “social-media

Figure 4

Vehicle theft in the City of Jackson and the State of Mississippi



Source: FBI, Crime Data Explorer, 2024

transfer of crime” (McGovern & Milivojevic, 2016; Kelley & Mozee, 2025; O’Quinn & Mozee, 2022. Wang et al. (2019) found a strong correlation ($r = 0.82$) between social-media activity and county-level crime rates across the United States. Similarly, viral social media challenges such as the “Kia Boyz” car-theft trend led to dramatic increases in vehicle thefts nationwide (including in the City of Jackson - see Figure 4) after spreading online (Li, 2023). These findings illustrate how digital culture has become a nontraditional, yet potent factor, as related to crime and crime reporting.

Despite encouraging reductions in homicides through 2025, the City of Jackson and state of Mississippi remain vulnerable to cyclical patterns of firearm violence. Persistent data gaps, lenient gun laws, and social-media-driven behaviors collectively help sustain and distort crime and the reporting of crime. Addressing these interconnected issues will require an integrated strategy combining stronger data infrastructure, targeted legislation, and sustained community partnerships.

Conclusions

The findings presented in this research brief indicate that although homicide and gun-violence rates in Jackson and across Mississippi have declined since 2021, the magnitude of such improvement must be viewed cautiously. Firearms, especially handguns, continue to account for the vast majority of homicides, reflecting a persistent structural issue rooted in weapon accessibility and questionable regulatory oversight.

The decline in homicide rates during 2024–2025 suggests that local efforts such as community-engagement initiatives and participation in the Black Mayors Crime Coalition (BMCC) could possibly be starting to yield measurable results. However, those gains could be short-lived if reporting gaps and limited policy interventions persist. Comprehensive participation in the *National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)* could help improve statewide transparency and enable policymakers to track outcomes more reliably.

This study also documented the influence of broader social and technological factors on crime and the reporting of crime. Economic strain, COVID-19 pandemic-related disruptions, and social-media diffusion of criminal behavior all contributed to various degrees in the calculation of homicide rates discussed earlier. Sustained reductions in homicide rates will therefore require a combination of evidence-based policing, targeted firearm legislation, and community-level interventions that address both access to weapons and the social environments that encourage violence.

Mississippi’s homicide trends illustrate the intersection of public policy, data integrity, and social dynamics. A continued commitment to accurately reporting crime data, enacting effective legislative reforms, and implementing collaboration prevention strategies is critical for converting short-term reductions in homicide rates into sustained long-term results. This research brief’s goal was to enlighten policymakers and other interested parties on those issues that could help bring about long term reductions in homicide rates. The next section presents several recommendations that can help bring about such short- and long-term reductions in homicide rates locally and statewide.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided to bring more awareness and potential solutions needed to decrease homicide and gun violence rates in the City of Jackson and the state of Mississippi.

Enhance Crime-Data Reporting

- The Mississippi Department of Public Safety should consider expanding its provision of technical and financial assistance programs to help local law-enforcement agencies fully participate in the FBI's NIBRS crime data system.
- Increase the level of transparency provided by Mississippi local law enforcement in keeping the public informed about the status of homicide cases and other violent crimes as to whether they are solved or unsolved.

Strengthen Firearm Legislation

- Mississippi policymakers should consider revisiting proposals such as House Bill 778 (2024) designed to raise age limits on assault-weapon purchases and implement universal background-check provisions.
- Consider enacting legislation limiting access to handguns since research has established such weapons as the largest contributor to homicides.
- Consider enacting legislation requiring the prompt reporting of lost or stolen firearms.

Expand Community-Based Violence Prevention Initiatives

- Continue promoting community-oriented policing (COP) and youth-engagement programs that have shown success locally and nationwide.
- Promote and fund more partnerships with local universities and non-profits for the purpose of enhancing research, data evaluation, public outreach, and successful program interventions.

Investigate the Role of Social Media

- Promote the conducting of future research examining the correlations between social-media activity and crime patterns in Mississippi. Understanding these digital influences could help inform preventive education campaigns and monitoring strategies.

Maintain and/or Establish Inter-Cities Collaborations

- Encourage more municipalities to join and/or establish membership in organizations such as the BMCC for the purpose of coordinating and disseminating successful approaches to reducing overall crime rates, especially local homicide rates.

- Promote more data-sharing, coordinated policy advocacy activities, and the evaluation of best practices among peer cities regarding crime and homicide reduction activities.

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