

DIGITAL FRAMEWORKS FINAL PROJECT: DC HOMICIDE DATA

By Matt Reynolds

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DC Homicides on Track to Increase in 2019

WASHINGTON - A recent spate of fatal shootings not only made July the deadliest this year but has also put Washington on course to surpass last year's total homicides.

A spate of gun violence in July brought the number of homicides in the district to 97, according to an analysis of city data. By July 2018 there had been a total of 93 homicides.

Last year, there was also a spike in the overall number of deaths compared to 2017. There were 160 homicides in 2018 compared to 115 the year before, a 39 percent increase.

That upward trend could continue through 2019.

On Aug. 6, the fatal stabbing of 29-year-old Pierre Fenner on the 5000 block of Bass Place of Southeast Washington brought the total number of homicides in the district to 100. There have been 105 fatalities in Washington so far this year, according to the most recent data.

In July, there were two fatal shootings in the Congress Heights neighborhood in the Southeast area of the district. One man was shot close to Ballou STAY High School while another was shot near a metro station, the Washington Post reported.

Those shootings reveal that while the overall numbers might change that gun violence is a grim and consistent reality for Wards 7 and Ward 8. In each of the last five years, those neighborhoods have recorded more homicides than in any other ward, according to city data.

Ward 8 Councilman Trayon White did not respond to multiple requests for comment. Ward 7 Councilman Vincent Gray's office also declined several requests for an interview.

After a string of homicides earlier this year, Gray noted in prepared remarks that his ward had asked for the police department to deploy more officers in the police's Sixth District. He said in April that there had been a "pronounced increase" in homicides in the police district.

"Nonetheless, the sheer deployment of more police officers is insufficient to stem the tide of violence that continues to plague our communities across Wards 7 and 8. We need the most experienced police officers deployed to the Sixth District," Gray said. "We want police officers who know our neighborhoods and who have a demonstrated track record of interacting effectively with our communities."

He also suggested the city should hire more “violence interrupters” to work in the community to prevent and curtail violence.

The southeast neighborhoods of Congress Heights, Bellevue, and Washington Highlands feel the strain of gun violence even more acutely. In two of the last five years, there were more homicides in that string of neighborhoods, known as Cluster 39, than in any other, according to the analysis. There are a total of 39 neighborhood clusters in Washington.

In 2014, Cluster 39 came second to a cluster that includes the neighborhoods of Sheridan, Barry Farm, Buena Vista but only by one homicide. In 2015, it equaled the cluster of Ivy City, Arboretum, Trinidad, and Carver Langston with 16 homicides.

The police blamed the violence on a jump in the number of illegal firearms that have come into the district. At a news conference in July, police chief Peter Newsham said that people charged with gun possession should face harsher punishment, and for the public to do more to help prevent violence.

In 2018 and 2017, gun violence accounted for 76% of all homicides, and in 2016, 77%, according to an analysis of the data.

Jen Pauliukonis of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, said lawmakers and political leaders must do more to address the illegal flow of guns from Virginia into the district.

“We need to have leaders working together. We need to have governors working together to determine where the illegal guns are coming from, and where they’re being diverted to the legal market,” Pauliukonis said in a recent phone interview. “We cannot address the epidemic of gun violence if we look at one city. This is a larger problem that’s affecting the entire country.”

Pauliukonis added that despite the need for meaningful reform, gun violence was not a “holistic issue.” There “are many different root causes of violence, including poverty, lack of education, lack of jobs, and drug markets,” she said.

“It’s important that as a nation and as the city of Washington D.C. while we are looking to address meaningful gun reform on the federal level, we also need to be looking at the root causes of violence and how we can improve the lives of people all over our country, especially in areas that have been disproportionately affected by violence, poverty, and crime,” Pauliukonis said.

The police department and the U.S. Attorney’s Office declined to comment for this story. Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton was not immediately available for an interview.

VISUALIZATIONS

[*DC Homicides by Method 2014 to 2019*](#)

[*DC Homicides by Neighborhood 2014 to 2019*](#)

DC Homicides by Ward 2014 to 2019