

Sarthak Girdhar

Toronto, ON | [LinkedIn](#) | +1 (647) 321-9567 | sg.sarthakgirdhar@gmail.com | Permanent Resident

Recommendations to improve Community Safety

A report inspired by Toronto Police's 'Analytics & Innovation' and 'Neighbourhood Community Officer' programs

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Introduction

Toronto Police has been using data analytics (more specifically, Power BI dashboards) to showcase crime stats to the residents of Toronto. As per their 'Analytics & Innovation' department, they regularly publish Crime Reporting Dashboards whose job is to inform the public with valuable and timely information related to crime activity in their neighborhood.

Analytics & Innovation

I really like the idea behind this program – making crime related datasets open to public. Moreover, residents of Toronto have the option to visualize that data via maps and dashboards.

Having said that, this doesn't mean that there is no scope for improvement.

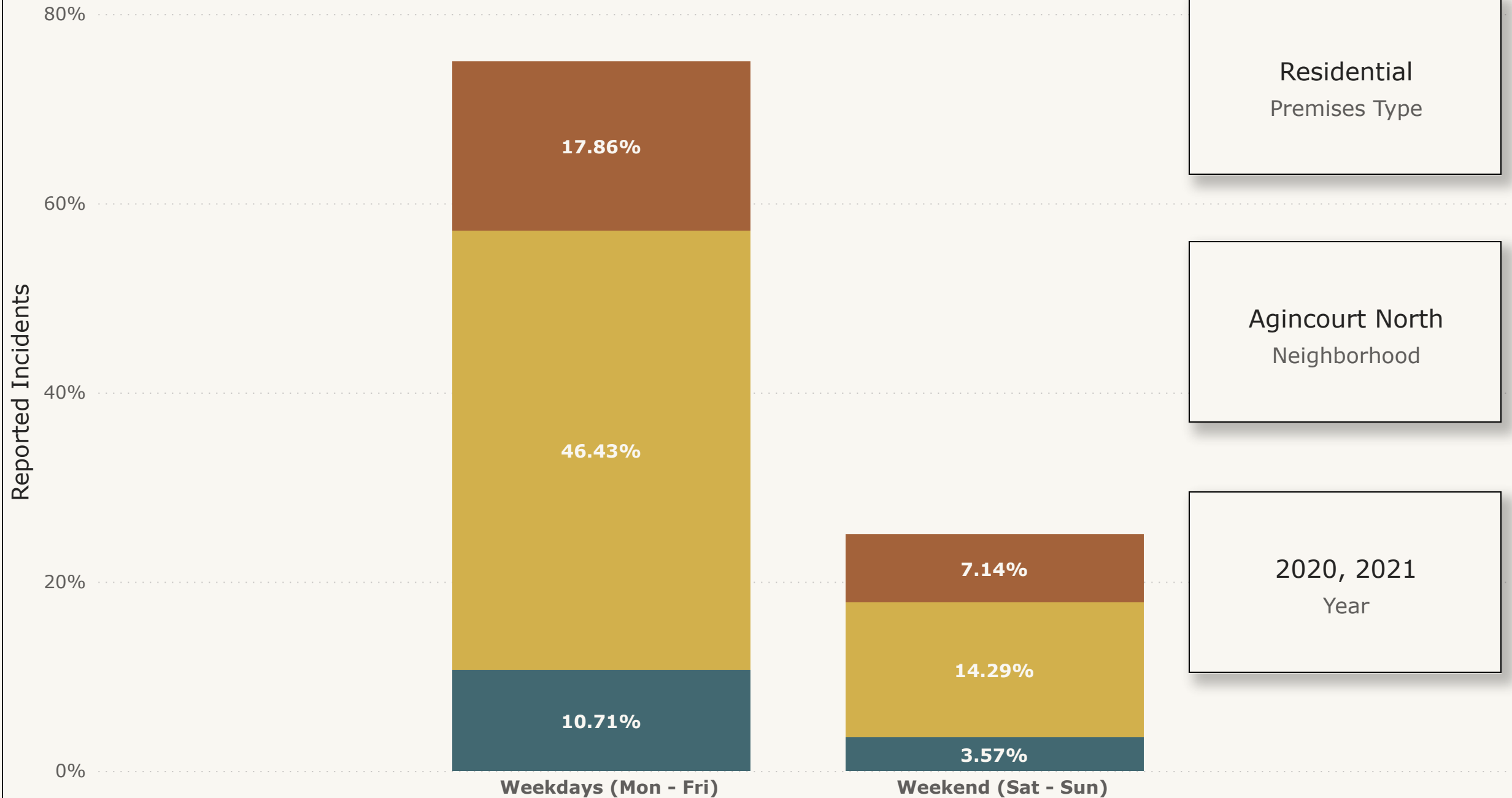
For example, the [Analytics & Innovation](#) department have their own Twitter page, however, there hasn't been any new tweets in almost 2 years. I find it difficult to believe that citizens would visit the TPS website and look at the different dashboards. If you want to deliver information fast (*a.k.a. in a timely manner*), it should be via a social media channel (*like, Twitter*) which people use more frequently.

Next, let's look at one of the [Crime Dashboards](#) (page 2). This page shows Breaking & Entering stats from the year 2014 to 2021. The reported incidents can be further broken down into day of the week, hour of the day, division, neighborhood, premises type, etc. Although the dashboard shows all the requisite stats, there seems to be too much information. Since, the audience for these dashboards is general public, I believe they won't be able to draw any useful information from these graphs.

I took the Break & Enter data from Toronto Police [open data portal](#) and drew the same dashboard with all the similar attributes (*please see page 2*). This chart can also be filtered for different years, premises type (residential, commercial, etc.), and neighborhoods. Kindly note, this is a static visualization; the .pbix file can be found on [GitHub](#).

Reported B&E Incidents by Day of the Week and Time of the Day

Time of the Day ● Evening/Late Evening (4 PM - 11 PM) ● Morning (8 AM - 4 PM) ● Night (11 PM - 7 AM)



On this chart, the residents of *Agincourt North* can clearly see that in the past two years (2020-21), their houses/apartments were THREE times more likely to get robbed during the morning hours on a weekday than the same hours on a weekend. This probably happens because people usually are at work during those hours. Now this information arms the residents of these neighborhoods to take some action to avoid/reduce Break & Enter incidents. For example, they might choose to install alarm systems and/or CCTVs. They might ask other people in their neighborhood (like, elderly, students, stay-at-home parent) to keep an eye on any suspicious strangers. This might also strengthen the bond among the members of the communities. I also chose to use 'Neighborhood' as a filter, instead of 'Division' as the residents might not be aware of their Division number. This chart can also be tweeted along with safety tips (that are already there on the Toronto Police website, but the citizens might not be aware of it).

Neighbourhood Community Officer Program

Next, let's have a look at the "Neighbourhood Community Officer Program". As per the [page](#), they act as ambassadors for the Toronto Police Service, working collaboratively with residents as well as community agencies to build sustainable solutions. I was happy to see that they are effectively utilizing their [Twitter handle](#) to bond and engage with the community.

There are 16 Divisions covering 51 neighborhoods. I would improve this program by introducing newsletters. Residents of a particular division should have the choice to subscribe to a monthly/quarterly newsletter. This newsletter is personalized to the residents of a particular division. It talks about high occurring crimes in their neighborhood and how they can protect themselves from it. For example, the newsletter for the '11 Division' might include a stat like, "67% of breaking into cars happen when valuables are left in sight". Post this, some tips can be included. This will help reduce a particular crime in the division and definitely, overall crime throughout the city.

The second usability of a newsletter is that the Police/Community Officers now have a list of email addresses of the residents of the different division(s). Now, you can ask the residents to complete surveys (ask them about their concerns, what improvements they would like to see, etc.), inform about any big events that might happen and how to commute properly so that there are no stampedes or any other incidents, gather interest for volunteer activities, etc. This will also increase the trust of the public in the Police as they are now an integral part of the decision making process (when it comes to law & order). And if the people are uninterested, you can always give them the choice to unsubscribe.

Conclusion

This brings me to the end of the report. As mentioned in the headline, this report presents some actionable recommendations to improve Community Safety in Toronto's neighborhoods. The report, in particular, looks at the Analytics & Innovation program and the Neighbourhood Community Officer Program, and suggests some viable solutions to decrease the crime rate in the city.

Note - Kindly note that this report is in no way a criticism of the efforts of the Toronto Police and its uniformed and civilian members.