

Chris Quay • [cquay@courier-journal.com](mailto:cquay@courier-journal.com) • April 6, 2009

## Study tweaks city's rate on murder

### Other factors help improve Louisville's national rank

Results of a recent study suggest that Louisville's homicide rate is lower than most comparable cities when poverty, unemployment and other crime-producing factors are considered.

The study, funded by the federal National Institute of Justice, is part of the Improving Crime Data Project based at Georgia State University and the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

The study analyzed homicide rates from 63 cities with populations of at least 250,000 in hopes of creating a more accurate ranking.

With 81 homicides in 2007, the year on which the rankings were based, Louisville ranked 26th out of the 63. But when the study's methods were applied, Louisville dropped to 40th.

The study only looked at homicide rates.

Chris Poynter, a spokesman for Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson, said the study's results back up the idea of Louisville being a safer city than most people might think.

"We've always said we were a pretty safe city," he said. "And this further validates that."

According to the study's Web site, police and other public officials often say ranking cities by their crime rates is misleading because they differ in crime-producing factors beyond their control.

"If you want to rank the cities, do it fairly," said Robert Friedmann, a criminal justice professor at Georgia State and one of the lead investigators for the study.

Friedmann said the study's methodology presents a better representational ranking of homicide rates compared with using flat rates.

Most studies use a rate that reflects the number of homicides compared only with the population, which Friedmann said is an "injustice" to crime data collection.

"When you take the traditional crime rate and you only look at the number of crimes and the size of the population, it's a step in the right direction, it's just not enough," he said.

While the study does include population, it also uses factors such as poverty, median household income and male unemployment.

The socioeconomic figures come from the American Community Survey of the Census Bureau.

Other cities near Louisville that made dramatic drops on the list with the survey's methods include Cincinnati, which fell from 12th to 54th; Indianapolis which dropped from 20th to 30th; and Memphis, Tenn., which plummeted from 10th to 62nd.

Friedmann hopes that people who look at the rankings understand they don't mean those cities can become complacent about fighting crime.

"The study is not saying that cities ranked low on the list don't have to do anything about their crime rate," he said.

He said city governments and police could use information to help guide them in areas that need improvement.

Poynter said the results are "something we could look at and talk to our police department about."

While Louisville Metro Police say the study presents interesting information in regard to homicides and the contributions demographics might make, "the data that we're most interested in is comparative years for Louisville metro," said Officer Phil Russell, a police spokesman.

"That is our biggest indicator on how we can we adjust or respond as needed."

Friedmann said that later this year, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation will become the first law-enforcement agency to try to use the study's results to help investigate why homicides are committed and prevent more.

Friedmann hopes that more agencies across the country eventually will do so as well.

Readers can reach reporter Chris Quay at (502) 582-4241.