

# Crime down again in St. Louis. We should be talking about it

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Tony Messenger | Post-Dispatch

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Crime is down in St. Louis.

I wrote [the same sentence](#) a year ago, when homicides dropped precipitously, continuing a trend going back several years. I wrote it [two years ago](#) and [two years](#) before that.

In 2025, the momentum continued. Last year, there were [140 homicides in St. Louis](#). Let's be clear: the number is too big. And it's a rate, based purely on the city's population, that puts St. Louis among the highest in the country. That's a historic albatross that isn't going to go away without a decades-long effort.

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But the recent progress can't be ignored.

Homicides are down 7 percent year over year. They're down to their lowest number in St. Louis since 2013, far below the pandemic spike that caused so much attention — even though the city was then, and is now, mostly following national trends. With a sustained swing toward better numbers for homicides and other violent crimes, one of the nation's foremost experts on crime prevention sees good things for St. Louis.

"You clearly have the wind at your back, in terms of the national picture. There is a pronounced national trend with homicide beginning to drop off, starting in 2022. St. Louis is in very good company in that way," says Thomas Abt, a criminologist and the founding director of the [Violence Reduction Center](#) at the University of Maryland.

St. Louis leaders brought Abt here a couple of years ago. He helped create the [Save Lives Now!](#) project that has police departments in the region working together on evidence-based strategies to reduce homicides in the city, the county and beyond.

"Save Lives Now has started to have an impact," Abt says. "I think we're playing a role in bringing all the key people together."

That last part can be a heavy lift in the St. Louis area. Our fractionalization — in government and policing — often makes it difficult for regional initiatives to succeed long term. That's not a new phenomenon. A decade ago, when the Police Executive Research Forum studied public safety here, it found that the "fragmentation (of policing) in the St. Louis region is extreme."

Indeed, that's the story of St. Louis, repeated over and over. That's why this sentence is so important:

Crime is down in St. Louis.

So why aren't we all talking about it? Every day. On the front page. On the 10 p.m. newscast. At news conferences at City Hall and, yes, in the state capital.

Because we're too busy picking fights over the wrong things.

Look at the headlines from the past few weeks. Mayor Cara Spencer, Board of Alderman President Megan Green, Gov. Mike Kehoe and Attorney General Catherine Hanaway are bickering among each other over who has the power to appoint the next sheriff. The former sheriff, Alfred Montgomery, was removed from office. He was an unmitigated disaster, but let's be clear: in St. Louis, the sheriff is a minor position that has nothing to do with fighting crime and is mostly known for the ability to hand out patronage jobs.

For Kehoe and Hanaway, this is old hat. Nothing pleases a statewide Republican in Missouri more than picking on St. Louis and its Democratic leaders. Spencer and Green are shadow boxing — perhaps previewing a future mayoral race — because in St. Louis, the next election always gets in the way of cooperation. This is what happens when you divide power and pit silos against each other.

Sometimes, it takes an outsider like Abt to see it.

“Working together across silos is never easy, and it’s not always easy in St. Louis,” Abt says. “But I’m pleased to see increasing progress in this area.”

Indeed, think about the momentous nature of the Save Lives Now! project, which isn’t even fully implemented yet. Its combination of focused deterrence, cognitive behavioral therapy and community outreach relies on the best crime-fighting techniques.

The project, conceived under former Mayor Tishaura O. Jones, [brought together all the leaders](#) of the East-West Gateway Council of Governments, including Republican leaders from Jefferson, St. Charles and Franklin counties. All parties settled on a strategy to reduce homicides. The business community backed it. Funding from the federal government helped pay for it.

With homicides dropping in St. Louis, those leaders should stand side-by-side, perhaps in front of the Gateway Arch, touting the progress.

Let Kehoe take credit for the state takeover of St. Louis police. It at least quieted talk of bad morale in the department. Let Jones take credit for starting the trend and hiring Police Chief Robert Tracy. Let Spencer and police officers take credit for the recent success, alongside Green and the Board of Aldermen and its Public Safety Committee. Let FBI Director Kash Patel take credit for an influx of federal officers in the city, even if he won’t tell us how many there are or what they’re doing. Let corporate leaders tout the statistics and announce that St. Louis is open for business.

There are several reasons behind the good news.

“You’ve got a relatively new police chief who is providing strong leadership,” Abt says. “After a very chaotic time with the previous prosecutor, there’s now stability. You’ve also got community coming together through intervention programs.

“I think one of the things to always keep in mind when violence falls, locally or nationally, it’s never one thing. It’s always a combination of factors happening at the same time.”

It’s not one thing. It’s not one political party. It’s not one elected official. It’s all of them. Politics is the art of the possible, and reducing homicides in St. Louis is happening in real time. Its leaders need to tell that story.

“Violence reduction is a team sport,” Abt says. “The team can’t win if the individual players don’t work well together.”

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