

FOUNDATIONS OF
VIOLENCE PREVENTION

in Fayetteville, North Carolina

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The **UNC Charlotte Urban Institute** is our region's applied research and community outreach center. We seek solutions to the complex social, economic and environmental challenges facing our communities.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UNC Charlotte Urban Institute assessed the comparative level of gun violence in Fayetteville using a mixed-methods approach that collated data from crime incidents and focus groups of community members in ShotSpotter neighborhoods.

KEY FINDINGS



Unearned Perception: While ShotSpotter neighborhoods report higher gun violence rates compared to the city overall, statistical analysis and resident feedback illustrate these differences are often minor and not statistically significant compared to similar areas in Fayetteville.

\$466M

Estimated Cost: Using proxies to account for the criminal justice system, employment, healthcare and diminished quality of life, gun incidents cost Fayetteville an estimated \$466 million in 2024.



The Age (Old) Question: Youth and young adults (ages 18 to 24) have a higher involvement in gun violence between 2021 and 2024. Resident perceptions suggest that pressures on youth drive them to gun violence. The findings also highlight concerns about easy access to guns among youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Recording and categorizing data to:

- Account for whether the incident was intentional and;
- Capture the relationship between victim and offender.

2. Expand prevention strategies in and outside ShotSpotter areas by seeking the support of local organizations focused on gun violence reduction.

3. Invest in local programs that focus on early prevention (youth up to age 18) by building skills, employment pathways, mentorship, and safe spaces.

4. Offer gun safety courses, hands-on demonstrations, and resources on best practices to empower individuals to take responsibility for their firearms.

5. Reframe the conversation around gun violence to provide more context to help people understand the systemic factors, such as disinvestment in communities, that could be contributing to violence.

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INTRODUCTION

Gun violence has drawn increasing national attention for its wide-ranging public health, economic, and community impacts. As of 2023, firearms accounted for approximately 18% of all deaths for children and teens (those under 20 years of age) in the United States. This is higher than motor vehicle or traffic accidents (16%), and has been the most common cause of death for this age group since 2020 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.). Overall, 46,728 people died from gun-related injuries in 2023, with 58% (27,300) of these deaths resulting from suicide and 38% (17,927) involving homicide (CDC, n.d.).

Death is only one of the many consequences of gun violence. Other negative impacts on communities include trauma and mental health harm, medical spending, lost productivity, and neighborhood disinvestment. Annual societal costs are estimated to reach hundreds of billions of dollars. (Cook & Ludwig, J., 2002; Everytown Research & Policy, n.d.).

In 2024, the UNC Charlotte Urban Institute (UI) was contracted by the City of Fayetteville for the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of gun violence and to recommend feasible and relevant prevention strategies to the City. To assess the

18% *Of all deaths among children and teens (those under age 20) in the United States in 2023 were caused by firearms (CDC, n.d.).*

landscape of gun violence in Fayetteville, the UI research team employed a mixed-methods approach that integrates both quantitative and qualitative data. (Creswell & Clark, 2017). This project leveraged administrative and publicly available crime incident data from the Fayetteville Police Department (FPD), focus group data with community members, and existing literature on the costs associated with gun violence.

The data was examined for both the City of Fayetteville and neighborhoods where 'ShotSpotter' gun detection technology has been installed. **This report does not constitute an evaluation of ShotSpotter.** Instead, we seek to understand how recent levels of gun violence differ between these areas and similar areas in Fayetteville, as well as hear community members' perspectives on gun violence.

Gun violence: *an incident (see definition below) where a firearm is involved.*

Violent crime: any firearm-involved incident where the offense description includes the following: homicide, sex-related offenses, robbery, and aggravated assault.

Non-violent crime: any firearm-related incident that does not meet the criteria of a violent gun offense.

Incident: an occurrence for which law enforcement files a report. An incident can include multiple offenses.

Offense: a distinct violation recorded within an incident (e.g., burglary, motor vehicle theft, assault). Offenses describe the nature of the criminal activity that occurred.

ShotSpotter: a gunfire detection technology used in communities to enhance police response; implemented in three 'zones' in Fayetteville in October 2023.

ShotSpotter neighborhoods: Three distinct neighborhoods identified by the police department as having a high level of gun fire, and where Shotspotter gun detection technology has been installed.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

SECTION QUESTIONS

Offenses involving a firearm

Q1 To better assess gun violence in Fayetteville, we began by examining the most common offenses associated with **non-violent** and **violent** crimes in Fayetteville, using publicly available and administrative crime data from the Fayetteville Police Department (Fayetteville Police Department, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c). Please refer to Appendix A for detailed information on how these datasets were cleaned and joined together to obtain the final dataset used to answer questions for both the Landscape and Cost Analyses.

Table 1 presents the number of occurrences involving guns for the years 2021 to 2024, summarizing the most frequent offenses overall (the total number of occurrences between 2021 and 2024) before examining the number of offenses by year.

Possession of a weapon, vandalism, and narcotics violations were the most common charges over the four years for **non-violent** offenses. While

Q1. What are the most common forms of gun violence in Fayetteville?

Q2. What are the characteristics of offenders involved in the various forms of gun violence?

Q3. How do rates of gun violence in Fayetteville change over time?

both possession of a weapon and drug violations increased over this time period, vandalism offenses decreased approximately 240% from 2021 to 2024. Aggravated assaults, a combined indicator for robbery, and criminal homicide represent the most common charges of **violent** offenses where a gun was used. Contrary to the **non-violent** crimes of possession and narcotics

violations, aggravated assaults (27%), robberies (26%), and homicides (56%) have seen a steady decrease over this period of time.

Characteristics of offenders

Q2 The second research question asks about the characteristics of offenders involved in various

Table 1 – Incidents of gun violence between 2021 and 2024 in Fayetteville

YEARS	Overall	2021	2022	2023	2024
Non-Violent					
Possession/Concealment	955	157	211	325	262
Vandalism (Damage To Property)	612	235	193	115	69
Narcotic Violations	572	112	142	176	142
Violent					
Aggravated Assault	401	116	113	87	85
Robbery (Business & Individual)	391	107	107	98	79
Criminal Homicide	113	39	27	30	17

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

forms of gun violence. Offenders are considered any individual identified from the victim(s), witness(s), and/or from investigative evidence, such as security or surveillance footage or forensic evidence. However, these descriptions and classifications can be unreliable and can, therefore, provide an inaccurate assessment as to who is involved in gun violence (Wells & Olson, 2003; Meissner et al., 2014).

We instead focused on arrestees as these are individuals detained by law enforcement under suspicion of committing a specific offense. These descriptions are more accurate as they are based on self-reported information or official verification. Due to small sample sizes, we only report on

Arrestee: refers to an individual who has been detained by law enforcement under suspicion of committing a specific incident. This could include individuals who were present at the crime or were found to be involved, even if they were not physically present at the scene of the crime.

the age groups of arrestees for **non-violent** and **violent** gun offenses below.

The 25-34 age group is the most common arrested for **non-violent** gun offenses in Fayetteville (Figure 1). The group ranges from a high of 46% of arrestees in 2021 to a low of 33% in 2023. In 2023,

the 18-24 age group was the most common arrested for **non-violent** crime. The least likely age group to be charged for these types of offenses is individuals 45 and over, as they never represent more than 10% of arrestees.

Figure 2 provides a similar story when examining **violent** gun offenses. Individuals between 25 and 34 remained the most common age group to be charged for these types of offenses until 2023, when they were surpassed by young adults (18 to 24). Young adults were the most prominent age group of individuals charged with a **violent** crime that involved a gun in 2023 and 2024

Figure 1 - Arrestees by Age Group for Non-Violent Gun Offenses

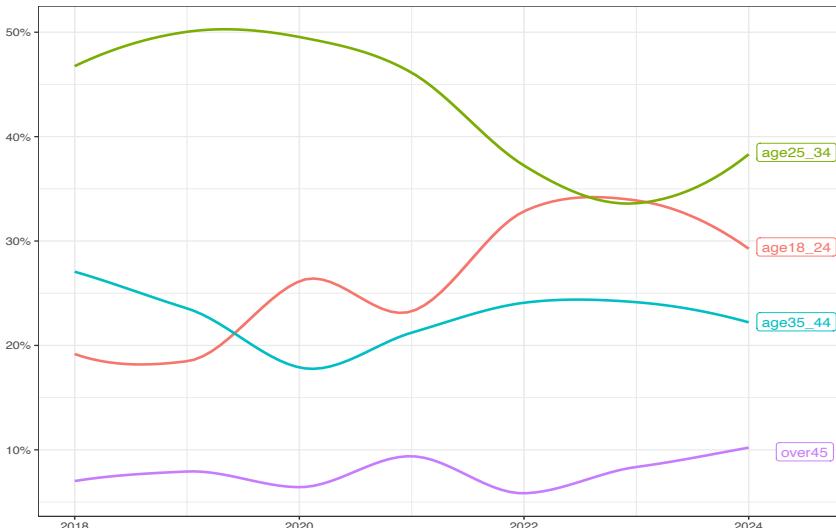
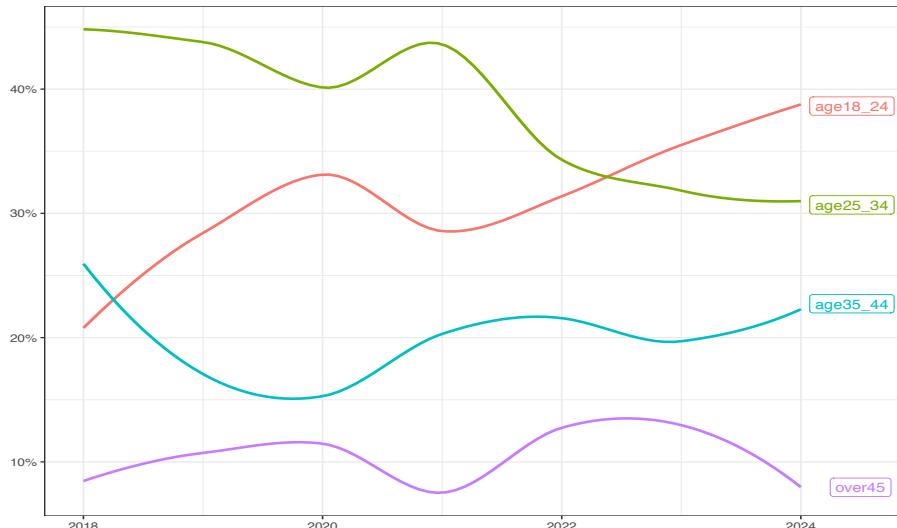


Figure 2 - Arrestees by Age Group for Violent Gun Offenses



LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Trends in gun violence

Q3

The final component of the landscape analysis that we reviewed was gun violence trends. We focused on the following questions:

- *How has gun violence changed in Fayetteville?*
- *How do Fayetteville rates of gun violence compare to rates in similar cities, like Greensboro?*¹
- *How does gun violence in ShotSpotter neighborhoods compare to similar neighborhoods in Fayetteville?*

To determine whether trends change over time and to compare cities and neighborhoods, we analyzed population data in relation to the rate of gun violence.²

Gun violence in Fayetteville

Figure 3 illustrates the monthly rate of gun violence in the Fayetteville Metro area between January 2022 and December 2024, including a linear trend line and a 3-month simple moving average (SMA) to smooth short-term fluctuations in the data. It should be noted that whenever the report mentions **non-violent** and **violent** crimes, we are only focusing on those crimes that involved a firearm in any capacity.

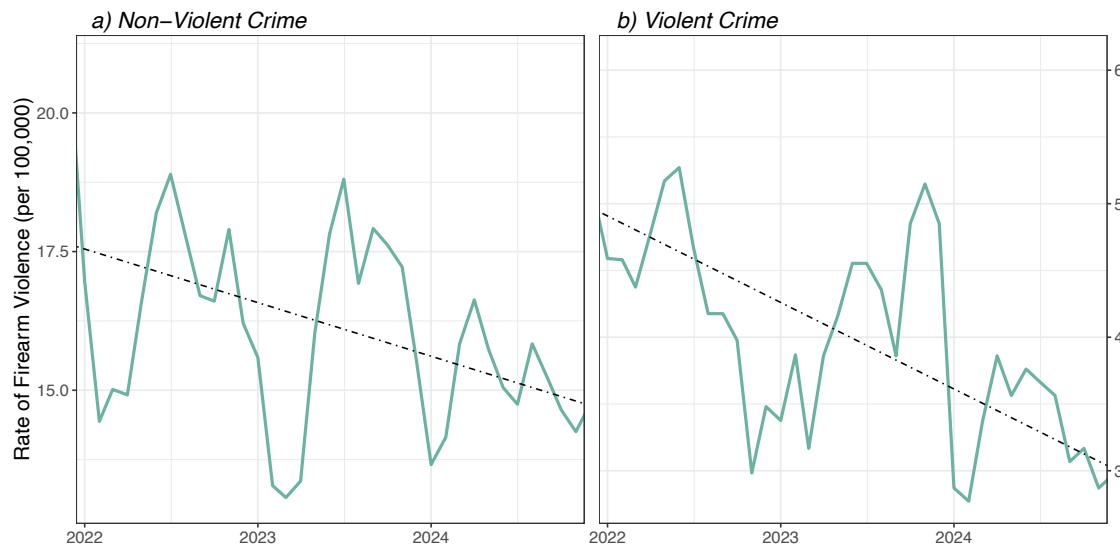


Figure 3 – Gun violence has decreased in Fayetteville over the last three years

Both figures illustrate that gun violence in Fayetteville has, in general, decreased over the nearly 36-month period. **Non-violent** crime decreased from 17.5 incidents per month per 100,000 residents to just under 15. **Violent** crime decreased from approximately five incidents per month per 100,000 residents to three incidents.

The overall trend line, however, does not negate the fact that both figures show a level of volatility. **Non-violent** crime increased during the the first part of 2022, then hit a monthly low during the first part of 2023, before increasing again in the middle of 2023 to approximately 19 incidents per month per 100,000 residents. A similar pattern is seen for **violent** offenses, though the increase for these crimes was more consistent throughout 2023 before falling sharply at the start of 2024.

¹Greensboro was agreed upon between the research team at UI and the City Manager's office in Fayetteville due to the similarity of the two cities on various socio-economic characteristics. Greensboro also provides crime data that is detailed enough to compare with the data provided from the Fayetteville Police Department.

²This study utilizes two different rates when looking at firearm violence. The number of incidents per 100,000 residents for the first two questions (city/metro level) before shifting to the number of incidents per 1,000 residents when comparing violence at the neighborhood level. The reason for this change is that the neighborhoods, based on Census Tracts, average between 4,000 and 8,000 people; these numbers make it impossible to utilize the original metric as it would provide results that are implausible.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Comparing trends in gun violence between Fayetteville and Greensboro

The next step in assessing gun violence in Fayetteville is to compare crime rates with those of a similar or representative city. Greensboro was selected as the comparison city due to its similarity to Fayetteville in terms of socioeconomic characteristics, such as race and median household income (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). In addition, Greensboro remains one of the few jurisdictions that identifies whether an incident/offense includes the use of a firearm, making the comparison with Fayetteville possible.

Examining **non-violent** crime rates, Fayetteville saw a mild decline over the four-year period (6% decrease from 2021 to 2024), culminating in its lowest level in 2024. Greensboro witnessed a different trend: **non-violent** crimes dipped sharply in 2022 before rebounding by the end of 2024 to roughly where they started at around 13 incidents per month per 100,000 residents. The difference in the non-violent crime rate between the two cities narrowed slightly by 2024, though Fayetteville has consistently had higher rates of **non-violent** crime over the last four years.

Table 2 - Monthly **Violent** and **Non-violent** Crime Rates in Fayetteville and Greensboro involving a Firearm

	Non-Violent Crime		Violent Crime	
	Fayetteville	Greensboro	Fayetteville	Greensboro
2021	16.1	13.1	4.85	11
2022	16.5	11.2	4.33	10.1
2023	16.1	11.5	4.11	10.7
2024	15.2	13.2	3.29	10.2

Note: Monthly rates are calculated as the number of incidents per 100,000 residents

The rate of **violent** offenses declined in both cities since 2021. Fayetteville experienced a 32% reduction over the four-year period while Greensboro experienced a decline just under 8%. Although **violent** crime fell in both cities, Greensboro's violent crime rate remained roughly three times that of Fayetteville's by the end of 2024 and the gap between them continued to widen in the past two years.

Gun violence in ShotSpotter and comparison neighborhoods

To begin evaluating potential differences in gun violence between ShotSpotter and comparison areas, a regression analysis was conducted using neighborhood-level data on crime rates (incidents per 1,000 residents). To make this comparison valid, however, the neighborhoods that were selected as a comparison group needed to be as similar to the ShotSpotter neighborhoods as possible. To achieve this, we employed a statistical technique known as propensity score matching to align ShotSpotter and non-ShotSpotter neighborhoods based on a series of variables, including race, age, and veteran status. A *more detailed description of the matching technique is provided in Appendix A*.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Looking at Figure 4a, **non-violent** crime rates in ShotSpotter neighborhoods increased steadily each year, from just over 30 incidents per 1,000 residents in 2022 to just under 40 incidents per 1,000 residents in 2024. Rates in comparison neighborhoods also increased, going from around 23 incidents per 1,000 residents in 2022 to around 31 incidents per 1,000 residents in 2024. While ShotSpotter neighborhoods consistently have higher rates of crime than comparison neighborhoods in all years, none of the differences are considered statistically significant.

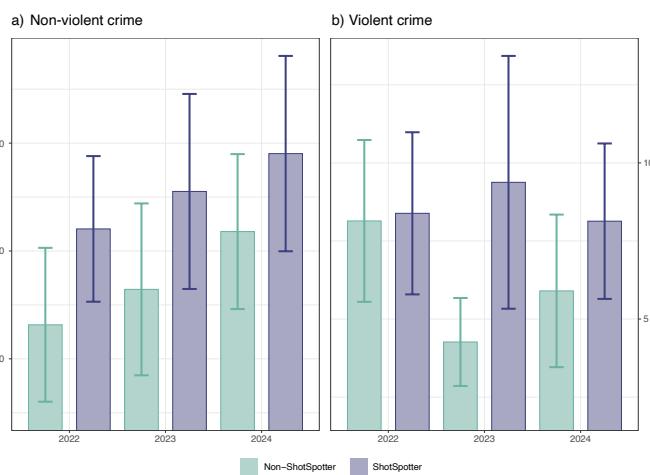


Figure 4 - ShotSpotter neighborhoods do not have significantly higher levels of gun violence compared to similar neighborhoods

Note: the bar graphs represent the crime rate within the respective neighborhoods (ShotSpotter or comparison); the attached bars represent the confidence intervals for the estimated crime rate. Note: ShotSpotter areas are identified by the color purple, while the control neighborhoods are green.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Since 2023, the most common **non-violent** offenses with a firearm included possession/concealment, vandalism and drug violations in Fayetteville. For **violent** offenses involving a firearm, aggravated assault and robbery were most common. Young adults (ages 18-24) constitute the **highest percentage of arrestees** for violent crimes utilizing a firearm, surpassing 25-34 year olds in 2023.

Gun violence, overall, has declined in Fayetteville since 2022; similar to trends seen at both the national and North

Carolina level (BJS, n.d.). There are, however, variations in the level of gun violence at the neighborhood level in Fayetteville.

Gun violence in **ShotSpotter neighborhoods is higher**, on average, than other neighborhoods in Fayetteville. Compared to areas with comparable characteristics, however, **violent** and **non-violent** crime rates are not significantly different. In other words, **these areas are not “outliers” in their level of gun violence** as neighborhoods.

Figure 4b shows that **violent** crime rates are similar between ShotSpotter and comparison neighborhoods in 2022 with around 8 **violent** offenses with a firearm per 1,000 residents. The ShotSpotter neighborhoods experienced an increase in **violent** crime rates, reaching just over 9 per 1,000 residents, while the comparison neighborhoods saw a sharp decline to around 4 **violent** firearm offenses per 1,000 residents in 2023. This difference decreased to approximately 2 incidents per 1,000 in 2024, with rates increasing in control neighborhoods and decreasing in ShotSpotter areas. Despite the observed differences in **violent** crime rates

between neighborhoods (especially in 2023), the overlapping confidence intervals suggest that these differences could be due to random variation rather than a systematic difference in these neighborhoods.

Confidence intervals: a range of possible values that reflect the uncertainty of the estimate. A wider interval suggests greater uncertainty while a narrower range suggest more precision (Dekking et al., 2005)

COST ANALYSIS

SECTION QUESTIONS

In recent years, cities and states have become interested in understanding the direct and human costs associated with gun violence in their communities. The human cost is often visible from the injuries and loss of life incurred by the victims, although the loss can be less visible in the form of ongoing mental health challenges and permanent changes to how an individual lives. As for the direct cost, gunshots can have a ripple effect that leads to immediate costs like police efforts, crime scene cleanup, and hospital emergency department (ED) expenses, as well as later costs like prison incarceration and ongoing health costs.

When determining the total economic cost of gun violence, we include direct costs as well as human cost, or intangible costs, that are referred to as "Quality of life" costs. Table 3 provides an overview of the types and categories of costs associated with gun violence included in this study. See Appendix B for a more detailed description of costs and the associated articles we relied upon.

Q4. What are the estimated direct (indirect) costs of gun violence related to the criminal justice system and health costs?

Table 3 – Direct and intangible categories of cost

Categories	Brief Description
Police*	Labor costs of responding to and investigating a crime such as controlling a crime scene, conducting interrogations and arrests, and appearing in court (<i>direct costs</i>)
Criminal Justice*	Court administration, and public defenders and prosecutors (<i>direct costs</i>)
Incarceration*	Costs related to housing of individuals convicted of crimes. (<i>direct costs</i>)
Medical	Medical costs associated with an injury for a year following the initial event such as outpatient procedures, office visits, ED visits, inpatient care, mental health visits, and pharmacy services. Medical transport and coroner's fees (for fatal injuries only) are also included (<i>direct costs</i>)
Employer	Loss of productivity for employers as a result of absenteeism due to a gun injury (<i>direct costs</i>)
Quality of Life	A cost valuation of the loss of function that brought meaning or satisfaction to the life of an individual who was directly impacted (<i>intangible costs</i>)

*These costs are collectively considered *Criminal Justice System costs*.

This report examined the economic costs for gun violence in 2024, the most recent complete year of crime data. Costs of gun violence included (when possible) costs to individuals, taxpayers,

and communities. The cost analysis relied on nationwide and state cost estimates as proxies for local costs in Fayetteville. Publicly available crime data combined with data provided by the

COST ANALYSIS

Fayetteville Police Department provided the basis for the calculation of the actual number of gun incidents, arrests, and victims in Fayetteville. All costs are provided in 2024 dollars. See Appendix B for methods on choosing the cost proxies.

To perform a gun-violence cost analysis, we use the number of incidents, arrests and victims. Not every incident has an arrest, while some may have multiple arrests. For victims, we are assessing costs for those who were involved in an assault or a homicide (collectively referred to as 'victims who incurred bodily harm'). Similar to arrests, an incident may have no victims who incurred bodily harm, or may have multiple victims with some form of bodily harm (see Figure 5).

Economic Costs

Q4

In terms of economic costs to society, the estimated cost of gun violence in the Fayetteville metro area for 2024 was \$466 million. The largest contributor to total costs were fatal injuries, or deaths (see Table 4).

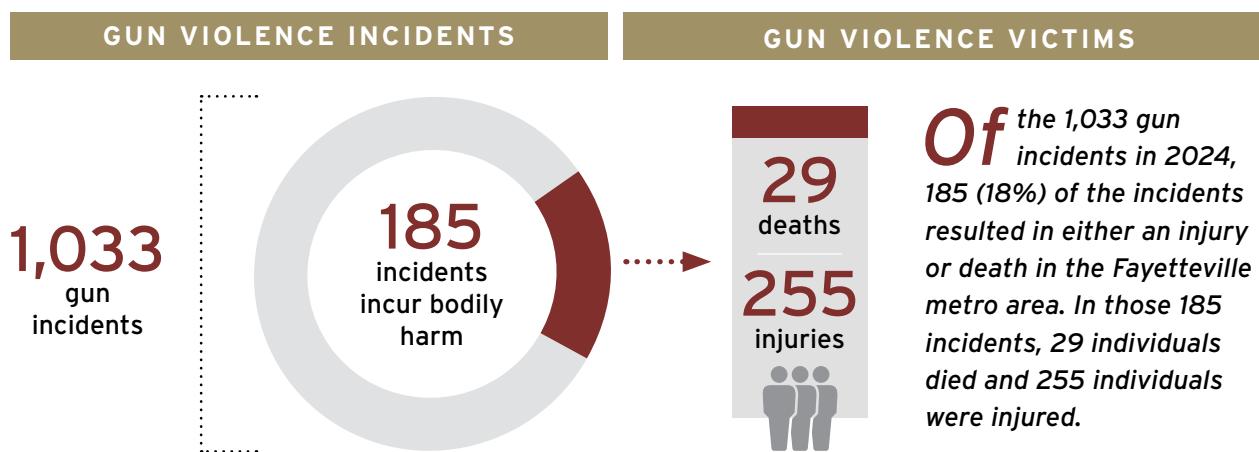
This estimate includes a variety of costs, but there are areas where costs were not available or data was out of date. Therefore, the estimate is an underestimate of the true cost of gun violence in Fayetteville. *For information on cost not represented in the estimate see Appendix B.* In addition, as discussed in the landscape section, 2024 represents a low point for both violent and non-violent gun incidents over the last four years, so the estimated total cost for 2024 likely represents a low point as well.

Table 4 - Economic cost by type of injury (2024 dollars)

Type of Injury	Economic cost
Incidents/ No Bodily Harm	\$19,432,523 (4.2%)
Non-fatal Injuries	\$30,464,742 (6.5%)
Fatal Injuries	\$416,004,952 (89.3%)
Total	\$465,902,217 (100%)

Driving costs higher for both incidents where the victim incurred an injury or died are intangible costs associated with decreased quality of life, or almost 90% of the costs by cost category (see Table 5). As mentioned above, Quality of life costs are intangible costs associated with an injury or death, and account for how a life is permanently changed as a result of a physical injury or being unexpectedly cut short (Miller et al., 2022).

Figure 5 - Gun Incidents resulting in bodily harm in 2024



Quality of life (for Costs): a way of assigning a value to how a person's life is changed as a result of an injury both in terms of quality and longevity of a life (Prieto & Sacristán, 2003).

COST ANALYSIS

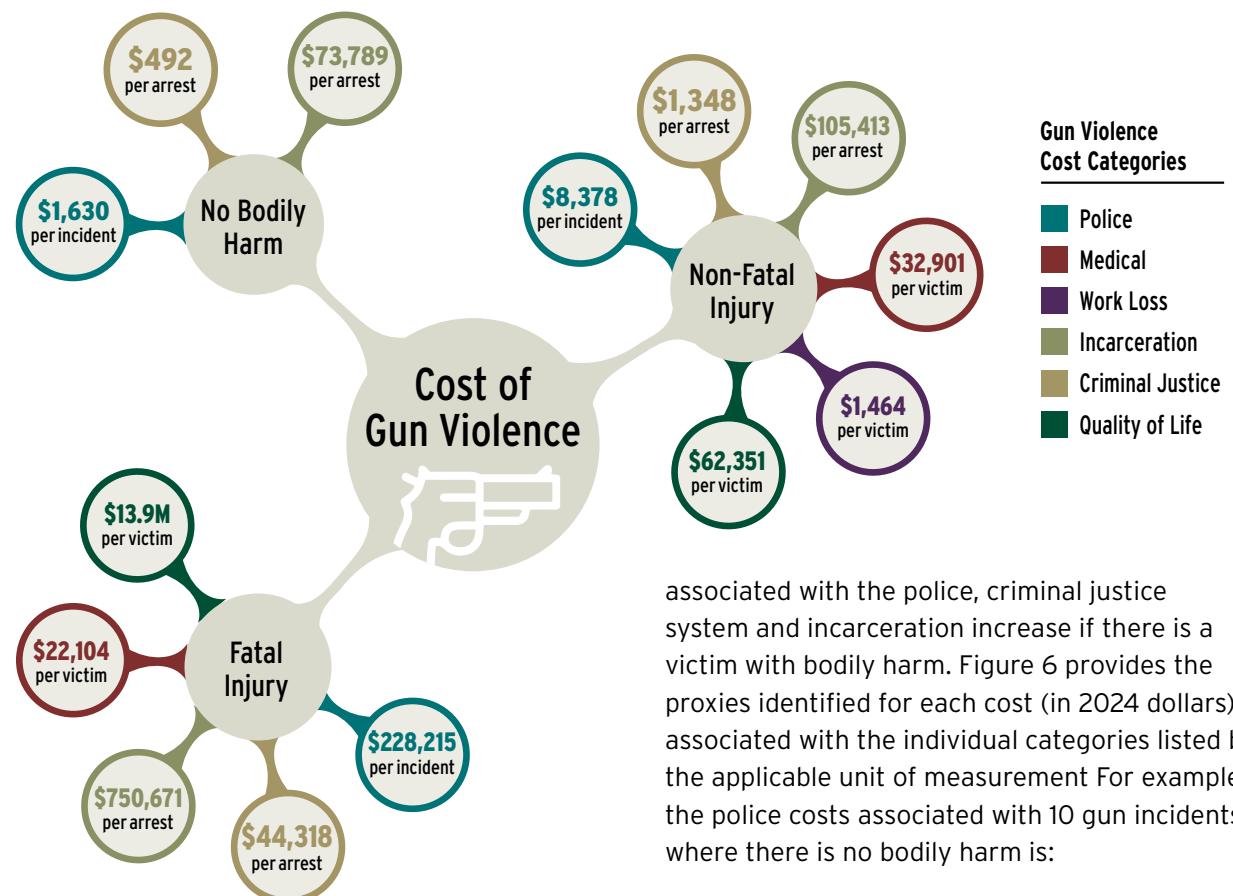
In terms of expenses related to the county, specifically the criminal justice system, the total was \$37 million. Costs related to the criminal justice system in 2024 are split between incidents with no bodily harm (\$19.4 million or 52.3% of criminal justice system costs), and those where a victim incurred bodily harm (\$17.7 million or 47.7% of criminal justice costs). While the criminal justice system costs are higher for the 185 incidents that included bodily harm, the large number of incidents with no bodily harm (n=848) makes a significant contribution to the total cost.

Table 5 – Economic cost by cost category (2024 dollars)

Cost category	Economic cost
Criminal Justice System	\$ 37,153,534 (8.0%)
Medical Costs	\$ 9,030,771 (1.9%)
Productivity Loss	\$ 284,016 (0.1%)
Quality of Life	\$ 419,433,896 (90.0%)
Total	\$465,902,217 (100%)

The total cost number helps to understand the magnitude of gun violence, however, at times it is easier to digest the cost of one incident or a series of incidents. In these cases, it is helpful to examine the cost of the individual components, or proxies we identified for and used for the overall costs.

Figure 6 – Cost proxies identified by arrest, victim or incidents



associated with the police, criminal justice system and incarceration increase if there is a victim with bodily harm. Figure 6 provides the proxies identified for each cost (in 2024 dollars) associated with the individual categories listed by the applicable unit of measurement. For example, the police costs associated with 10 gun incidents where there is no bodily harm is:

Police Costs for 10 incidents (no bodily harm)
 $= 10 (\# \text{ of incidents}) \times \$1,063 (\text{police costs for incidents w/ no bodily harm}) = \$10,630$

Depending on the number of individuals arrested the cost would increase (based on Chein, 2020, it is assumed 65% of arrests result in a conviction).

Costs are calculated based on the data available from the crime data, or whether each incident had any arrests associated with it, and whether there was a victim with bodily harm. Costs

COST ANALYSIS

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Total estimated costs for gun incidents for Fayetteville was \$466 million in 2024. **Costs associated with gun violence affect everyone.** Costs affect taxpayers through tax dollars spent on the criminal justice system, employers in the form of lost work time, and most importantly for the victims through healthcare costs and diminished quality of life. The economic cost of gun violence supports the funding of prevention programming alongside programs aimed at responding to and deterring gun crimes.

Although the number of victims of homicides (n=29 victims) are eclipsed by the number of gun incidents with no bodily harm (n=848

incidents) and victims of assaults (n=255 victims), the intangible cost due to the loss of life (estimated average cost for a loss of one life: \$13.9 million) **make homicides the largest contributor to the economic cost** associated with gun incidents. In addition, higher costs associated with police, criminal justice and incarceration contribute to the higher costs of homicides.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

SECTION QUESTIONS

This section reports findings from the pre-discussion survey (see Appendix C) and focus groups. Focus group findings are organized by key theme, and do not directly answer the research questions. *For themes related to the research questions see Appendix D.* The purposes of the focus groups were to learn from community members about their perceptions and experiences with gun violence, risk and protective factors related to gun violence, and opportunities for prevention.

Focus Group Protocol

Prior to each focus group, all participants (n=29) completed an online survey. The survey included questions to capture demographic information, community strengths and challenges perceived as preventing or causing gun violence, and attitudes related to gun violence. This survey was conducted in order to better understand the participants.

Focus group participants could join either in person or virtually. Each focus group followed the

Q5. How do residents describe the risk and protective factors considered most relevant in their neighborhoods?

Q6. How do community residents in areas identified as high-risk describe community needs and assets related to violence prevention?

same protocol. Questions about perceptions and experiences related to community strengths and challenges (e.g., "What's your favorite part of this community?"), causes of gun violence (e.g., "What have you heard or seen as causes of gun violence in this area?"), and strategies to prevent gun violence (e.g., "What do you think the community could do to prevent violence in this area?") were asked. Participants also reacted to a description of ShotSpotter. See Appendix E for additional information on the qualitative research methods used.

Focus Group Participants

A total of 29 community members from the Cliffdale, Murchison, and Massey Hill neighborhoods participated in 7 focus groups (range: 3-7 per group). Fifty-five percent of participants were women, and 90% identified as Black or African American. Fifty-two percent held a bachelor's degree or higher. The average age of participants was 42 years ($SD^* = 14.9$; Min = 18,

Max = 70), with a range spanning over 50 years. They lived in or visited the focus area for an average of 23.4 years ($SD = 14.4$). Several participants held a job at some point that may have required gun training. We are unable to report further or more detailed information on the demographics or backgrounds of the focus group participants due to the small sample sizes within these groups. See Appendix C for demographic questions and related response options included on the pre-focus group survey.

In response to the questions on the pre-focus group survey, most participants indicated gun violence was a problem, and most believed access to guns was a problem in the focus area. A gun presence measurement scale showed reported presence, with an average of 4.9 ($SD = 1.5$) on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree).³ These findings were used to contextualize focus group findings by showing the beliefs of the sample and should not be generalized to Fayetteville as a whole.

³An example of a scale item is "If I carried/when I carry a gun, I am less likely to be hurt from an attack."

^{*}SD stands for Standard Deviation.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

Focus Group Themes

Five major takeaways, or “themes,” were identified in the focus group data. Each of these major themes had multiple sub-themes. (See Table 6 for list of themes and sub-themes.)

Theme 1: Negative perceptions of neighborhoods contribute to disinvestment, which may create an environment that facilitates gun violence

Focus group participants discussed the strengths and challenges of their neighborhoods. In terms of strengths, many participants cited neighborhood historical components, and some highlighted existing resources, such as schools, parks, and

Gun culture: “encompasses how both individuals and institutions consciously and unconsciously interact with guns, through beliefs, thoughts, behaviors, social and legal norms, as well as the social structures they project onto them. It includes the social interactions elicited or transformed by the existence of firearms, as well as the reciprocal influences between individuals, groups, and institutions in regards to gun ownership and use” (Boine et al., 2020, p. 2). It is important to note that here, “gun culture” is specific to the study’s focus groups discussion of gun violence in ShotSpotter areas and does not aim to comprehensively capture the full range of gun dynamics in Fayetteville.

Table 6 – Focus group themes and sub-themes

Theme	Subthemes
Negative perceptions of neighborhoods contribute to disinvestment, which may create an environment that facilitates gun violence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Stereotypes and perceptions don’t always align with realities or recognize the strengths of neighborhoods.Disinvestment decreases resources and opportunities to meet basic needs and enable thriving.
Gun culture and exposure contribute to an environment that presents opportunities for unsafe gun-related activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">There is easy access to guns and inadequate knowledge about safe gun use.Exposure to guns and gunfire may normalize gun violence or increase its acceptability.
The community has concerns about the return on investment for ShotSpotter and wants more information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">People feel they need more information about the effectiveness of ShotSpotter before they can state an opinion.There is concern about return on investment for ShotSpotter and a potential for unintended consequences.
Youth developmental factors drive gun violence and are opportunities for prevention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Underdeveloped social emotional skills combined with youth social dynamics and peer pressures can lead to gun violence.Youth may lack guidance from present and positive adult role models to move beyond survival mode.Restorative practices and hope for the future are needed.
Consistent community engagement is needed within communities and across sectors to support prevention of gun violence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Current policing practices are not perceived as community-oriented, which may perpetuate cycles of distrust.There were mixed reports of experiences with neighborhood engagement and cohesion among community members.Preventing gun violence will “take a village.”

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community-oriented local businesses. Some also noted growth through housing and businesses, depending on the neighborhood. However, many also noted a lack of resources in general to meet basic needs and community-level support for youth, in addition to the run-down appearance of historical spaces. Overall, focus group participants felt that their communities were misrepresented in the media and by reputation, ultimately shaping disinvestment. The following subthemes reflect these ideas and how lack of opportunities may contribute to gun violence as discussed by participants.

Subtheme: Stereotypes and perceptions don't always align with realities or recognize the strengths of neighborhoods.

Although many participants noted exposure to guns and other crimes, most felt the neighborhoods discussed were perceived by outsiders as more dangerous than other communities that may experience similar challenges. Participants perceived that their neighborhoods are not what their reputations may lead people to believe. When asked how their neighborhood compares to others in Fayetteville with respect to guns, overall, most felt that there were no major differences; **"gun violence can be anywhere."**

Participants noted that disproportionate media coverage of crime or negative events contributes to misperceptions of communities. One participant shared:

I think it's [gun issues] comparable, but I think what happens is that we make the media quicker than any other area because it's [neighborhood].⁴ Back in the day, it wasn't always the best to be from [neighborhood], and I think that stigma still sort of has a life unto itself. And I wish that life cycle would end because there's nothing wrong with being from [neighborhood].

Some participants for one of the selected neighborhoods did sense that gun violence, among other forms of crime, was worse when compared to other neighborhoods.

Outside perceptions of certain neighborhoods have negatively influenced the trajectory of growth and investment. For example, one participant noted:

Back in the day, [neighborhood] was always on the blacklist for the military... When you're talking about that, that to me is like a systemic issue. It's been planted. And so when you hear people talking about [neighborhood], they always go to a negative connotation first or a negative thought. It's not anything positive.

Systemic issues such as racial profiling and the lasting effects of race-related policies (e.g., redlining) also emerged when discussing neighborhood contexts.

Subtheme: Disinvestment decreases resources and opportunities available to meet basic needs and enable thriving.

Participants described neighborhoods lacking resources, bringing up issues such as food deserts, lack of employment opportunities, and lack of affordable recreational opportunities for youth. Lack of resources was ultimately linked with the potential for gun violence and other undesirable activities. One participant explained the link between disinvestment and lack of opportunities:

You would like for it to look the part or becoming of the setting or what type of growth and development we are projecting, like in this setting. But when you come up in [neighborhood] and other neighborhoods similar, and you have rundown buildings and they are old, there are less activities to do.

Participants linked lack of opportunities to gun violence in two main ways. First, participants discussed an alternative economy to meet basic needs (i.e., engaging in dangerous activities to bring in income); **"...the things that I did in**

⁴Neighborhood names have been removed to maintain anonymity.

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the streets is what paid all the bills in the household. Second, and sometimes also related to money or income, was youth developmental contexts (i.e., engaging in dangerous activities because there aren't positive activities available). A backdrop of unmet mental health needs was also discussed. One participant tied some of these ideas together:

“

Mental health. Especially with our young boys' misplaced hate, misplaced frustration. A lack of culturally competent things to do...A lot of times I got into things as a young kid where it was nothing serious, but just nothing to do with being around each other all day would kind of spark into something that wasn't even supposed to be nothing. Sometimes you got to have an outlet for some of this energy to go somewhere.

Participants often discussed gun violence in the context of other risky activities, such as drug trafficking and gang involvement.

Theme 2: Gun culture and exposure contribute to an environment that presents opportunities for unsafe gun-related activities.

Gun-related beliefs and practices were discussed in the focus groups. Focus group data highlighted the prevalence of guns, access to those guns, and

desensitization or normalization of gunfire. One pre-focus group survey included the response, **“with young people today, carrying a gun is like carrying a phone. Everybody has one.”**

Subtheme: There is easy access to guns and inadequate knowledge about safe gun use.

Access to guns and lack of knowledge about guns, including appropriate use and storage, were discussed during focus groups. Participants shared that youth and others obtain guns from home burglaries, local military, illegal gun sales, and 3-D printing. Easy access was illustrated by the following quote:

“

Kids are able to get to weapons right now more than ever before. Whether they're getting guns from family members, from their neighbors, they're in the schools with them, whether it's broadcast or not, they have a free hand at this.

Safe gun storage was highlighted as a problem. Participants in several discussions described a lack of “gun IQ,” where many members of the community don’t know or use best practices in handling guns. The need for education around safe use was emphasized, as exemplified by the following quote:

“

I'm talking about the kids, honestly. People teach their kids at a young age how to clean guns and how to use guns. People do it for recreational purposes. So it's okay once they're at an age appropriate level to teach them how to use them and about them and the pros and cons of them. I'm not saying teach them to walk around the street with the guns. No, but I'm saying teach them like, “This is how they work and this is when you shouldn't use them and this is how you should use them and these are people you can use them and be safe with.”

Education about different types of guns was also discussed in the context of individuals not understanding that high-powered rifles are not needed for home protection.

In summary, guns are prevalent, but knowledge or practice related to how to use and store them is not. Participant recommendations for increased “gun IQ” are particularly salient given gun accessibility

Subtheme: Exposure to guns and gunfire may normalize gun violence or increase its acceptability.

Normalization of gunfire and gun violence has occurred through neighborhood and social media exposure, leading to desensitization and

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behavioral adaptations. Several participants noted personal experiences with in-person exposure to gunfire or hearing gunfire. For example, one participant said:

“

I hear gunshots a lot when I'm walking my dog or just going out for a run myself and that's scary. And so those things are what are concerning me about the area right now. It's like it's normal to feel unsafe when you're stepping outside.

Overall, participants shared heightened vigilance of their surroundings, choosing to avoid walking late at night or “**knowing where to go or not to go.**”

For youth specifically, participants noted media exposure (video games, social media, etc.) to gun violence and how it may glorify some components of gun violence but not show its consequences. As described by one participant, “on social media, it's made to seem like it is acceptable.” Peer pressure related to social media and violent video games also emerged in conversation.

Theme 3: The community has concerns about the return on investment for ShotSpotter and wants more information.

Q6

During focus groups, the facilitator presented a definition of ShotSpotter then probed for

perceptions of ShotSpotter. Overall, there was varied awareness, and participants wanted more information about its effects. Many participants questioned return on investment and possible unintended consequences. Some participants felt it was a positive resource, but with caveats related to potential unintended consequences.

Subtheme: People feel they need more information about the effectiveness of ShotSpotter before they can state an opinion.

Most focus groups included participants who had never heard of ShotSpotter. Some participants were familiar with the name “ShotSpotter” due to exposure in Fayetteville or another city that implements the technology, but few had additional information. Relatedly, many participants wanted additional information on ShotSpotter as well as its effects. One person in particular noted the importance of evidence-gathering before sharing opinions of ShotSpotter. For example, a participant posed several questions: “**Has it solved any crimes? Has it deterred the shooting? Is it still happening as frequently as it has been before y'all put it there?**” Others were concerned about the wrong people being identified by police following a notification. In summary, participants wanted to have questions answered about its operations and effectiveness before drawing conclusions about ShotSpotter.

Subtheme: There is concern about return on investment for ShotSpotter and potential for unintended consequences.

Many participants felt the funding for ShotSpotter would be better used elsewhere given potential unintended consequences and limitations of the technology. One participant noted that resources would be wasted if shots were fired for hunting or recreation without first notifying the police. More commonly, others discussed how the financial investment was not worth it and could instead be spent on proactive efforts to prevent gun violence (i.e., primary prevention), as exemplified by the following quote:

“

That [ShotSpotter funding] could be a gateway for some of those things that we discussed here today, earlier on in the session. For those activities or those programs, let's give my man \$8 or \$10 an hour to come in and work.

Additionally, some participants noted potential unintended effects of having ShotSpotter in their neighborhood, such as (a) crime displacement to locations without ShotSpotter, (b) enhancing negative perceptions of communities via awareness that certain neighborhoods were targeted for having gun violence, or (c) negative police associations rather than positive police-community engagement.

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“

...this negative piece that we have now associated with police-put them in our community, being a part of the community, spending time in the community so that there's a deterrent that we have this presence here and not...that ShotSpotter, whatever it is. I'm more about the face-to-face, the people thing, the community thing.

Some of the participants who were supportive of ShotSpotter voiced the concern of crime displacement and thought that ShotSpotter should actually be spread to additional areas in Fayetteville.

Finally, some participants did share positive sentiments about ShotSpotter **“adding that extra sense of protection”** and feeling the resource should be further distributed.

Theme 4: Youth developmental factors drive gun violence and are opportunities for prevention.

All focus groups discussed child and youth development, often in the context of complex family and neighborhood environments. Children living in disinvested neighborhoods often face trauma and are not emotionally equipped to handle the pressures they face. Participants noted challenges related to peer pressure, role models, parenting, and other social dynamics. Participants often recognized the need for credible

mentors, already embedded in their communities, who can guide youth through the difficulties of development and offer hopeful perspectives for the future.

Subtheme: Underdeveloped social-emotional skills combined with youth social dynamics and peer pressures can lead to gun violence.

Modifiable individual-level characteristics such as attitudes, skills, and behaviors related to problem solving and emotional regulation were discussed as contributors to gun violence: **“It's rejection and being able to handle life...All of that stuff needs to be brought into their life at an early age.”** Participants noted that youth may act aggressively in response to a problem because they have not yet developed emotional intelligence or healthy coping skills. This discussion also described the need for youth to have healthy outlets and safe spaces, like counseling settings and programs. As noted previously, participants felt these communities are lacking those sorts of healthy outlets or spaces.

Participants described how lack of social-emotional skills may result in violence during social situations, where potentially minor disputes may lead someone to use a gun as a method of problem solving. For example, one participant reflected:

“

...when I was in high school, I liked to go out. I liked to go to parties, but I stopped doing that and my parents stopped me from doing that just because it was so much violence out there. Even after the parties, just so much shooting. People getting into fights, disagreements.

Some participants also described a broader unhealthy social environment that places youth in survival mode. One person described the impact of peers and unhealthy peer environments:

“

A lot of peer pressure. A lot of kids feel like they're in fight or flight. They either got to hang with these people or they get beat up by these people or they got to fight for their life or they got to be the one killing to survive. And I hate that these kids have to experience this and I don't wish it on them but it's their reality sometimes or what they believe is their reality.

And again returning to challenges related to under-resourced communities, participants discussed how unmet basic needs at home may lead to “fight mode” at school (e.g., inability to maintain good hygiene and bullying).

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The combination of gun accessibility and underdeveloped social-emotional skills is a risk factor for gun violence. Participants emphasized the value of social emotional development for violence prevention.

Subtheme: Youth may lack guidance from present and positive adult role models to move beyond survival mode.

When asked about causes of gun violence, participants in all focus groups brought up parenting challenges (e.g., **"Kids are raising kids. That's the problem."**) or lack of positive adult models in the lives of youth. As described by one participant, **"...it's like people just going in the community, just trying to be survivor mode. They don't know no better, stuff like that, because they don't have no guidance, you know what I'm saying?"** Participants discussed a lack of guidance for youth, noting parental roles and the need for positive and relatable mentors to support youth development.

Specific to parenting discussions, parent-related challenges were often described as being nested within other challenges, such as struggling to meet basic needs: **"Knowing this person is working three, four jobs and this young man is home pretty much raising himself. So also, not understanding, my mama got to work, put food on the table, but he also feels neglected."**

This quote speaks to challenges faced by families living with limited resources and potential consequences for children. Relatedly, participants talked about parent absence and intergenerational transmission of risk factors for gun violence, such as gang involvement.

Participants also discussed the need for positive messaging from models beyond parents, noting unique challenges faced during adolescence:

“

When I was younger, I needed a me. When I was 16, my mama couldn't do nothing with me...she had to wash her hands with me and let the system deal with it, and the system dealt with it. Just to be truthful. However, the same thing that I needed then, this is what these young people need now today, which is more positive male influence. And who is winning that battle right now are these rappers.

The role of non-parental role models is important, especially given participants also talked about how some youth grow up in supportive homes and still go on to engage in undesirable activities. Several participants noted the importance of youth hearing guidance from adults with lived experience:

“

It takes a team, it takes the community, it takes mentors. It takes people who have experienced gun violence coming back and talking to these kids. It takes family members being like, "I wish I never did that." And putting their pride aside and actually talking about how it affected their mental health to go to prison, to go to jail, to take an innocent person's life away by accident. It takes everybody.

Additionally, participants emphasized that guidance needs to come from multiple sources, not community mentors or family members alone.

Subtheme: Restorative practices and hope for the future are needed.

Although less explicitly discussed across focus groups, restorative practices and hope for the future emerged as a subtheme related to youth development. One participant noted, **"they're not telling those kids, you could be what you want to be."** The need for hope for the future was also discussed in relation to the justice system; for example, one person said:

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“

...no matter what the age, once they figure out they're here [incarcerated], this amount of time, that's all they hear. So that light turns off like, "Well, I'm going to continue to be doing what I'm doing here because I'm not going to get out."

This quote reflects a potential effect of justice involvement. Several participants described a need for restorative practices, exemplified by the following quote:

“

So, I would like to deal with restorative justice, practice where we restore the thoughts of young men, for the juvenile that's doing time, we'll facilitate re-entry workshops, where we're dealing with restoring their self-concept and their self-esteem about themselves.

These ideas are reinforced by discussions' focused on community-driven prevention and youth development.

Theme 5: Consistent community engagement is needed within communities and across sectors to support prevention of gun violence.

Throughout all of the focus groups, the need for community engagement and community-oriented approaches to gun violence prevention emerged.

Three subthemes focused on community-oriented policing, the mixed experiences of community engagement and cohesion among community members, and the idea that prevention will "take a village."

Subtheme: Current policing practices are not perceived as community-oriented, which may perpetuate cycles of distrust.

The need for presence and engagement in these communities extended to multiple groups, including law enforcement. Discussions related to community-oriented policing emerged in all but one focus group, against a backdrop of acknowledging trust-related issues. The overall sentiment was that police will show up when called, but they aren't otherwise involved with the community, so trust is not established. One participant shared, *"I only see police over there whenever something's going on,"* while another said, *"We want you to live down the street, so we want to get to know you. We want you to be present in our community and raise your kids in our community, where we raise our children."*

Some participants noted that engagement challenges go both ways; for example, *"...they [the police] have had activities in our community. But people, the turnout is so low."*

There was also discussion more generally about community members' lack of engagement with police and other emergency services, such as 911.

Building a culture of trust and positive relationships between neighborhood residents and law enforcement could have a positive impact. Police may receive more information about local activities, and communities may benefit from perceptions that police are there to build relationships instead of only attending to criminal activity. The idea of community perceptions emerged again here, with one participant reflecting:

“

...if I was coming over there, if I was coming to buy a house in that neighborhood and I seen outright police presence where it's going down then, yeah, that's going to be a problem with me wanting to invest in that community. But if I'm astute to my environment and I can see that this police officer is engaging with the community, talking with the kids, I can tell the difference between the two.

Participants talked about consistent effort to build trust, where community members and law enforcement officers "meet halfway" to reduce tensions when police are present.

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Subtheme: There were mixed reports of experiences with neighborhood engagement and cohesion among community members.

Discussion of community trust and engagement extended beyond conversations related to law enforcement, revealing a spectrum of perceptions related to engagement and a sense of togetherness. When talking about their neighborhoods, participants shared descriptions ranging from **"We're close-knit"** to **"There is no community. It's every man for himself."** Some participants described packed high school sports events, while others discussed lack of recreation center use. For those whose experiences demonstrated cohesion or connectedness, it was a point of pride and belief in the community: **"And as a community, when it's time for rallying folks together, to come together to have conversations, people will come out."** Being close knit was connected to issues of perceptions of threats (e.g., **"if they don't know you, they may not embrace you"** regarding being out late) or knowing who may be carrying a gun.

On the other hand, participants talked about community members not attending community events, such as neighborhood watch meetings, or youth not playing outside anymore (e.g., basketball). Relatedly, one participant discussed how youth join gangs so they can have a sense of belonging.

Some of these disconnects were ascribed to limited opportunities for connection as well as potential

weariness of inaction. For example, participants discussed communication as a challenge:

“

...it's like nobody really knows what's going on. So even when it comes down to mentoring, nobody even goes to the rec centers anymore. We used to have basketball games every weekend, so you kind of knew what was going on in the community. Nobody really knows about anything. So I guess the lack of communication in that side of town.

Related to weariness of inaction, one participant said, **"I think, as a community, we do a terrible job of just rushing certain things, putting it out there in the atmosphere and not coming back and not following through."**

Comments indicated that a lack of engagement or cohesion may have emerged over time; for example, one participant added, **"We used to talk to one another, but we don't talk now."** Participants highlighted the need for increased engagement, such as attending community events and then taking it a step further to shift from conversations to action. Participants talked about the need for consistent on-the-ground efforts for engagement to move from **"a lot of talk"** to actual change.

Subtheme: Preventing gun violence will "take a village."

Participants offered rich discussion related to approaches to gun violence prevention. The sentiment "it takes a village" was echoed across focus groups. This idea applied to individual child development: **"it is easy for us to say what the parent is not doing, but it takes a village to communicate to one child,"** as well as developing unified coalitions: **"even if you had a face of that community from one person, city officials, local government, police department, general population, I think everybody needs to be involved to prevent violence and gun violence."**

Participants suggested all parties have a role to play, with examples including: parents and mentors teaching children about guns and life skills, and then those youth teaching their friends (using social networks); police teaching about 911 use and build community relationships; city officials listening to community members and creating infrastructure to support prevention. The sentiment of all groups working together was reflected in the following quote:

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“

We need the schools, the churches, nonprofit organizations, we need the local businesses...The councilmen and stuff. It needs to happen. It takes a village to kind of raise a child...Everybody going to play a unique part ...Unity in the community is missing. It's unity in the word community for a reason. So we can come together...share our resources, our network and our support systems and tie that together in unity. We ain't going. That's what community's for, right?

Participants spoke to the need for on-the-ground engagement, such as door knocking, as well as a participatory community-driven approach to prevention. This included the use of and investment in already existing resources (community strengths) in these communities, such as schools, churches, nonprofits, businesses, and neighborhood watch groups.

Participants emphasized internal community leadership but also recognized the potential value of an outside perspective. Related to the need for internal mechanisms, one participant said,

“

And so we have to get the people who are in the community to actually step up and be a part of this conversation. And I do agree a peer support mentor or specialist is someone who could be instrumental in being solution focused, but with the people who reside in the community. If you living outside the community, you standing up and you advocate and you don't even reside in the community, I'm not sure your voice is going to be as strong if you are presenting to the ones who can make things happen versus the people who actually live within the community.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

In summary, focus group participants with extensive knowledge of Fayetteville communities offered rich contextual information about the nature of gun violence and its related contexts in these areas. Findings show the multi-layered web of factors that can influence violence, ranging from relationships with families, mentors and the broader community to societal issues that contribute to shaping the individual. Prevention will need to address all of these layers and may gain the most optimal levels of local buy-in if the community is directly involved in guiding prevention planning and implementation.

SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

SECTION INTRODUCTION

An overview of previous sections

The landscape quantitative analysis indicates that gun violence, overall, has declined in Fayetteville since 2022, though certain neighborhoods, like the ones in the ShotSpotter zones, experience disproportionately high levels of violence. Yet, the analysis also found that ShotSpotter neighborhoods are not “outliers” when compared to similar neighborhoods.

The cost analysis estimates that gun violence cost taxpayers, employers, and victims approximately \$466 million in 2024. Homicides represent the largest contributor to total costs due to combining the value of a lost life with higher criminal justice expenditures.

Drawing from the focus groups, the qualitative analysis distilled five recurring, meaningful themes from focus group participants:

1. Stigmatizing perceptions of certain neighborhoods fuel disinvestment, which can create conditions that facilitate gun violence.

Before integrating the findings and providing overall takeaways for the report, we will restate the key findings from our landscape, cost, and focus group analyses. This initial step highlights the trends, economic costs, and community perspectives on gun violence that were previously discussed before assessing the collective scale and impact of this type of violence in Fayetteville.

2. Gun culture and exposure normalize risk and increase opportunities for unsafe gun-related behavior.
3. Residents have questions about ShotSpotter, expressing skepticism about its return on investment and asking for clearer information and accountability.
4. Youth developmental factors—such as unstructured time, limited positive mentorship, and exposure to trauma—both elevate risk and present actionable points for prevention.
5. Participants emphasized the need for consistent, multi-directional community engagement across agencies, organizations, and residents to sustain prevention efforts and build trust.

Qualitative analysis: the in-depth interpretation of non-numerical data to understand meanings, experiences, and contexts.

Quantitative analysis: the systematic examination of numerical data to identify patterns, test hypotheses, and estimate relationships using statistics.

INTEGRATED FINDINGS

SECTION INTRODUCTION

Data and residents' experience show comparable levels of gun violence across peer neighborhoods

According to focus group participants, the neighborhoods within the ShotSpotter zones carry a negative reputation that exceeds what the best available comparative data support. Residents feel their neighborhoods are stigmatized as uniquely dangerous, driven in part by disproportionate media attention, though their neighborhoods are not markedly different from other parts of the city with similar challenges, as noted in the following quote:

“

Gun violence can be anywhere [but] when you hear people talking about [neighborhood], they always go to a negative connotation.

This section brings the strands from the previous sections together to generate integrated findings—insights that leverage results across the various methods of this study. Here, we align the cost and trend estimates with community perspectives to produce a more complete, credible, and useful understanding than either the quantitative analysis or community narratives can deliver on their own.

This disconnect aligns with the data from the landscape analysis. While rates of gun violence in ShotSpotter neighborhoods exhibit higher crime rates than their matched peers in some years, the differences are small and statistically insignificant. In other words, neighborhoods outside of the ShotSpotter zones are also in need of resources and preventative measures/programs.

While the level of gun violence in ShotSpotter neighborhoods may not constitute an anomaly, these areas do experience higher levels of gun violence compared to the City overall.⁵ Focus group respondents highlighted how gun violence was just a part of their “normal,” stating “**I hear gunshots a lot when I'm [out]... It's like it's normal to feel unsafe when you're stepping outside.**” While Fayetteville, in general, experienced declining rates of violent and nonviolent gun crimes, the increasing (or

stagnant) level in these neighborhoods since 2022 confirms these neighborhoods experience higher-than-average gun violence, but they are not unique in this regard.

Young adults (ages 18 to 24) and gun violence are often tied together

A disproportionate amount of focus, both locally and nationally, has recently been aimed at young adults (18-24) when discussing gun violence. This is not surprising from a statistical standpoint as data going back to the 1980s shows how this age group is disproportionately more likely to be involved in violent crime. To the point where this phenomenon (known as the age-crime curve) became a theoretical expectation in criminology and criminal justice literature (Kim & Bushway, 2018; Kazemian, 2021).

⁵Scholars have frequently noted the importance of macro-level factors when studying crime, specifically the influence of resource deprivation/affluence measures (particularly income inequality) and social cohesion (Land et al., 1990; Kawachi et al., 1999; McCall et al., 2008). These works point to the structural, rather than the individual, as the primary influence in how crime rates shift over time.

INTEGRATED FINDINGS

The landscape analysis also showed increasing involvement of young adults (18-24) in violent gun crimes. This group constituted the highest percentage of arrestees for violent crimes using a firearm, beginning in 2023. They were the second largest percentage of arrestees for non-violent firearm offenses between 2021 and 2024.

The prominence of this age group in relation to gun-related offenses appeared in the qualitative findings as well, with respondents (primarily adults) providing their perceptions about why youth and young adults become involved with gun violence. Specifically, there was discussion about how youth are put at a disadvantage:

“

A lot of kids feel like they're in fight or flight. They either got to hang with these people or they get beat up by these people or they got to fight for their life or they got to be the one killing to survive.

Perceived widespread firearm access seen as a significant issue

Easy access to guns was discussed during the focus groups. Participants describe youth and others accessing guns through various methods including burglaries and from family members. Young people were specifically mentioned in terms of the ubiquity of guns: **“with young people today, carrying a gun is like carrying a phone. Everybody has one.”**

The perception of gun accessibility appears to be consistent with gun-violence trends within the ShotSpotter neighborhoods (as discussed in the initial integrated findings). While (non-)violent gun violence has seen a decline in Fayetteville, overall, rates of non-violent gun crime in ShotSpotter neighborhoods increased just under 17% from 2022 to 2024 and the violent gun crimes remained consistent over this time period.

This notion of increased accessibility of firearms, at least in certain areas of Fayetteville, comes as North Carolina considers eliminating the requirement to obtain a permit in order to carry a concealed handgun (Freedom to Carry NC, n.d.). Recent literature finds that permissive gun laws such as the ones the state has recently implemented lead to a statistically significant increase in the level of violent crime, even after accounting for various socioeconomic, criminal, and demographic factors (Donohue, Aneja, and Weber, 2019; Donohue, 2022).

Finally, perceptions of gun accessibility in communities could be related to increases in gun purchases during the COVID pandemic. Nationally there was a spike in gun purchases during COVID that was apparent throughout the US (Lang & Lang, 2021; Miller et al., 202). An increase in guns often leads to greater gun violence (Laquer et al., 2019; Schliemer et al., 2020).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The widespread effects of gun violence, evident from the cost analysis, argue for a public health approach, or moving interventions upstream to address disinvestment, overall exposure to guns, the need for social-emotional skills development prior to exposure to gun violence, and engaging with communities (Hemenway & Miller, 2013). Focus group members spoke to greater upstream prevention strategies particularly in terms of providing youth and young adults with mentors and support, as well as calling for more partnership between the community and local government leaders. These types of interventions can work alongside existing response and deterrence interventions.

The City of Fayetteville has already begun to pursue these efforts with the creation of the Office of Community Safety (Weisblat, 2025). This section is an effort to provide additional guidance and assistance to the programs and initiatives already in place based on research conducted for this project and elsewhere. While this should not be considered an exhaustive list of recommendations, we believe these recommendations in conjunction with the study recently completed by the Wilson Center will provide the City with a good foundation



...We believe these recommendations in conjunction with the study recently completed by the Wilson Center will provide the City with a good foundation for understanding and tackling gun violence from a more nuanced and actionable perspective.

for understanding and tackling gun violence from a more nuanced and actionable perspective.

We begin this section by discussing the general rationale behind the type of recommendation before listing specific programs and policies in table 7 at the end.

Classifications within policing data

The police and/or the City provide a great deal of information, specifically related to the use of a weapon (firearm) and the types of injuries victims sustain, within their publicly available and administrative datasets. Having said that, we noticed a few instances over the course of the study where additional information/context would be instrumental in assisting with the study of gun violence.

To begin, we recommend recording and categorizing the intentionality of the recorded incident (if possible). This can include distinguishing between:

1. Intentional, e.g., targeted assault;
2. Unintentional/accidental;
3. Self-inflicted (suicide attempt); or
4. Undetermined cases.

The rationale for this distinction is relatively straightforward: intent matters and can fundamentally alter prevention and response strategies. Suicide prevention and safe-storage campaigns require very different interventions than targeted criminal-justice responses, and accidental discharges point to storage education needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Second, investigate ways to capture the relationship between victim and offender, such as classifying incidents as intimate partner/domestic, known acquaintance/friend, family, stranger, gang/conflict-related, or unknown. Similar to the rationale discussed above, correctly differentiating the relationship between the victim(s) and offender(s) of gun-related incidents is essential due to the distinct risk dynamics and prevention strategies for each type of offense. Together, these additions will make Fayetteville's data far more useful for targeting interventions and allocating resources to programs that are tailored to meet the specific needs of different forms of violence.

Broadening prevention efforts and intervention strategies

Another recommendation is for the City to implement their prevention strategies not only in ShotSpotter zones, but also in other neighborhoods that the data show face similar levels of risk. While ShotSpotter areas consistently register high activity of gun violence, the landscape analysis indicates they are not statistical outliers—other neighborhoods exhibit comparable concentrations of shootings and underlying risk factors—so limiting resources only to sensor zones would miss numerous high-need places. One possible approach is for the City to pilot interventions in several areas that are comparable to neighborhoods within the ShotSpotter zones.

As part of any community-based intervention, it is important to be able to understand the success of the program. Offering support for local organizations focused on gun violence reduction in creating data-oriented evaluations can help program leaders gain the skills necessary for improvement and measuring success. Fayetteville's Office of Community Safety initiated micro-grants to local organizations focusing on crime reduction, including gun violence (FayettevilleNC, n.d.). As part of the grant process, local organizations take part in workshops to support the organizations. One workshop could assist organizations in creating logic models to help identify how programs intend to provide support to those with the highest risk, facilitating the collection of data to track outcomes and impact, and identifying locations/places they feel would benefit from a particular intervention program. Evaluation of programs should emphasize program improvement and support.

Placed-based improvements to support crime and violent crime reduction

Disinvestment in communities was a theme from the focus groups, with community members talking about how the appearance of their neighborhoods affected the community. Efforts to improve the physical environment to support changes in behaviors and perceptions are in line with a public health approach.

Investment in vacant lots through the clearing of debris and mowing are positively associated with

Communities that have required minimal improvements to abandoned buildings in the form of replacing windows and doors, or demolition of abandoned buildings have seen declines in crime including firearm violence (Branas et al., 2016; Gobaud et al., 2022; Stacy, 2018).

reduced violent crime (Gong et al., 2022; Heinze et al., 2018). In particular, when community members are involved with maintenance, it creates social cohesion and a busier environment that helps deter criminal activity (Gong et al., 2022).

Requiring improvements to abandoned buildings, or demolishing the buildings, can have a similar effect as greening vacant lots. Buildings in disrepair can offer a hiding place for crime or give the appearance that disorder is acceptable (Schnell et al., 2019). Communities that have required minimal improvements to abandoned buildings in the form of replacing windows and doors, or demolition of abandoned buildings have seen declines in crime including firearm violence (Branas et al., 2016; Gobaud et al., 2022; Stacy, 2018).

Increase awareness about best practices related to media coverage of gun violence

Focus group members felt their communities were often portrayed as more dangerous than other similar communities. In addition, there was discussion about how residents felt gun fire was a normal occurrence. Local media coverage around gun violence can play a role in how people

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perceive gun violence in their own community and other communities. The media can also influence what the community wants to prioritize. News media can bring extra focus to certain types of gun violence such as homicides and child involved gun violence, while other gun violence such as domestic violence is overlooked (Beard et al., 2024a; Esposti et al., 2025).

There has been a recent push for an increased public health framing in the media of gun violence. This means news stories that provide more context to the event to help people understand the systemic factors such as disinvestment in communities that could be contributing to violence. Public health framing also discusses solutions so readers do not become fatalistic about gun violence. News content that emphasizes the people involved, information and resources can help reduce trauma to victims and increase community knowledge of public health solutions (Beard et al, 2024b).

Given that 18-24-year-olds commonly represent the highest share of violent offenders using firearms, combining early-stage supports with targeted interventions for older teens and emerging adults creates a continuum of prevention that addresses both root causes and immediate risks.

Local community organizations could collaborate with local media to discuss ways to provide more context to stories addressing violence to minimize unintentional harm to communities. Resources can be found at “Better Gun Violence Reporting: A Toolkit for Minimizing Harm” (Frameworks Institute, 2025). Sharing free resources around best practices can help support a public health framing of gun violence.

Emphasize early and family interventions

Given the landscape analysis and feedback from the focus groups, we recommend that the ongoing violence prevention strategy must place young people at its center. This means investing in accessible, local programs that build skills, employment pathways, mentorship, and safe spaces where youth already gather, and by prioritizing early prevention beginning well before age 18. There has been success in deterring youth involvement in gangs through school-based programs involving presentations from law

enforcement (Mellgren et al., 2024), and hand-gun use through the Communities That Care program (Rowhani-Rahbar et al., 2023). Developmental prevention programs, which help youth manage aggressive behaviors, have been successfully used in many settings such as schools, family training and clinics (Farrington et al., 2017).

Research shows that patterns of offending and risk-taking often emerge in early adolescence. This is when youths' general attitudes change. They form peer networks and disengage from school. They become more exposed to community disorder. Whereas programs that reach preteens and young teens can interrupt trajectories that might lead to violence in late-teen and young-adult years (Willoughby et al., 2021). Given that 18-24-year-olds commonly represent the highest share of violent offenders using firearms, combining early-stage supports with targeted interventions for older teens and emerging adults creates a continuum of prevention that addresses



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potential risks. For example, Cure Violence is a selective program which aims to have community-based 'violence interrupters' intervene to stop violence by working with high-risk youth and young adults (Butts et al., 2015).

Focus on programs and interventions promoting best practices for gun safety

North Carolina's gun laws are, comparatively, more permissive than other states, according to the Giffords Law Center and Everytown for Gun Safety Gun (Everytown Research & Policy, 2025; North Carolina Gun Laws, 2024). This level of permissiveness, combined with the legal prohibition of localities creating their own gun policy, means that a legislative or policy solution is not feasible. There are, however, alternative measures to prevent and/or reduce gun violence.

Proper gun safety practices—such as safe storage, responsible handling, and regular maintenance—have been found to represent a key component of reducing firearm injuries (Rowhani-Rahbar et al., 2016; Anestis et al., 2023). Training programs that educate gun owners about these fundamentals have been shown to reduce both unintentional injuries and suicides, making them a powerful tool for community well-being even in the absence of stricter legislation (Smart et al., 2023; Carter & Cunningham, 2024). There has also been some success in promoting gun safety through health clinics particularly when safe storage devices are provided as part of the counseling (Rowhani-Rahbar et al., 2016).

Coordination between the police department and community organizations can be instrumental in promoting a culture of safety. By offering gun safety courses, hands-on demonstrations, and resources on best practices, these groups can empower individuals to take responsibility for their firearms. Community-led initiatives also

foster dialogue and trust, helping to build a shared commitment to reducing gun violence. While changing laws may be difficult, changing attitudes and behaviors through education and outreach is a practical and effective way to make communities safer for everyone.

Table 7 – List of targeted issues and suggested programs

Targeted issue	Program	Source
Investment in place-based improvements	Greening vacant lots	Gong et al., 2023; Heinz et al., 2018
Misperceptions from Media	Toolkit for better gun violence reporting	Beard et al., 2024
Youth involvement in gun violence	School-based deterrence programs; Fostered deterrence	Mellgren et al., 2024
Youth hand-gun use	Communities That Care	Rowhani-Rahbar et al., 2023
Youth behaviors	Developmental prevention	Farrington et al., 2017
Targeting Older Teens	Cure Violence	Butts et al., 2015
Gun safety	Training programs	Smart et al., 2023; Carter & Cunningham, 2024
Gun safety	Counseling offered in medical clinics	Rowhani-Rahbar et al., 2016
Safe gun storage	Credible messengers	Anestis et al., 2021

CONCLUSION

This report offers research findings specific to Fayetteville and neighborhoods identified by the City of Fayetteville as having heightened levels of gun violence. The report also offers recommendations for prevention planning based on best-available evidence in research literature and the context of Fayetteville. Moving forward with violence prevention planning, it is important to recognize that researchers and communities are still working to identify specific underlying causes of violence (that would allow more targeted prevention work). While living in neighborhoods with high levels of poverty is linked to community gun violence (Barrett et al., 2022; Kravitz-Wirtz et al., 2022; Schleimer et al., 2021), the underlying mechanisms of that relationship are not fully understood (Ludwig, 2025). For example, there is increasing research on potential violence reduction through built components, such as building remediation (Branas et al., 2016; Gobaud et al., 2022) and greenspace (Gong et al., 2023; Heinze et al., 2018). As such, staying informed of the latest evidence will support increasingly effective efforts to reduce gun violence and other forms of crime.

On another note, what has been found to be effective in one city may not be effective in another. Ongoing conversations with those involved in implementation (e.g., grassroots organizations, police officers, city officials, initiative recipients) will be crucial for identifying facilitators and barriers to implementing evidence-based practices and programs. Further, implementing the “core components” (Blase & Fixsen, 2013) or active ingredients, according to protocols is important. However, methods of implementation may need to shift to be more locally relevant.

Lastly, people (and their modifiable skills, knowledge, and behavior) are nested within their neighborhood, city, state, and country. The policies, practices, and norms that are communicated across these contexts influence individuals’ behavior. Comprehensive and sustainable violence prevention requires addressing each of these levels in addition to an individual’s development.



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QUANTITATIVE METHODOLOGY

Crime Datasets

The research team imported the three publicly available datasets (crimes against society, persons, and property), transforming them into a consistent coordinate system (EPSG 4326), combining them into a single dataset, and then removing offenses with invalid or unfounded statuses. One thing to note about the Fayetteville data is that the incidents list all associated offenses rather than reporting the highest-rated offense (according to the Uniform Crime Reports), which is common in other datasets. This issue was mitigated by grouping offenses by case number (incident) and date, and linking offense descriptions into a single string.

We then imported the administrative crime dataset provided by the Fayetteville Police Department, which includes information on individuals involved in crimes, such as offenders, victims, and others, as well as the type of weapon used in an incident. The dataset was aggregated, i.e., summarized, by month to tally the number of offenders, victims (demarcated by whether the victim was injured or fatally wounded), and whether the incident involved any firearm. Finally, all charges associated with each incident were combined into a single string.

Geographic Boundaries and Matching

In QGIS, three shapefiles—the metro-area boundary, the county census tracts, and the ShotSpotter neighborhoods—were employed to ensure the final dataset focuses on incidents within the city limits of Fayetteville. We filtered the census tracts to only include those within the metropolitan boundary. To estimate “ShotSpotter Neighborhoods”, we then conducted a spatial join where we selected the Tracts that “intersect” the ShotSpotter layer before creating a new variable to denote whether a tract is selected (1 to imply it is considered a ShotSpotter neighborhood) or not (0 means it is outside the ShotSpotter area).

Matching neighborhoods is a crucial step in quasi-experimental research, especially when random assignment isn’t possible. By matching neighborhoods with and without ShotSpotter on factors such as previous crime rates and demographics, the comparisons, and consequently the results, are more fair and valid. By minimizing differences between groups, the research team can appropriately assess whether the neighborhoods selected for ShotSpotter monitoring were truly higher risk or if other factors influenced placement.

The MatchIt library in R was used to match neighborhoods based on several important factors, including:

1. Violent crime rate (per 1,000 residents)
2. Crimes involving a firearm rate (per 1,000 residents)
3. Demographics: race, gender, and age (under 25)
4. Economics: percent below the poverty line, veteran status, and Gini index of the neighborhood

The matching specification utilized the “optimal” distance to minimize the differences between units on the previously listed variables. Overall, these settings help ensure that the comparison is fair and that the results are reliable and meaningful in relation to the study’s goals.

COST METHODOLOGY & DESCRIPTION OF COSTS METHODS

Methods

The research team completed an extensive review of the literature to locate current nationwide, and where possible state specific, estimates of the various costs. For medical costs, which typically rely on administrative data such as hospital and insurance claims data, there was a fair amount of current literature available. However, when it comes to police and criminal justice costs, where there are no market prices, cost estimates were more limited. Articles were chosen based on methods used, recency of data, and inclusion in other reputable sources or models (i.e. PIRE injury model, CDC WISQARS, Everytown's report on the cost of gun violence). Table 1 presents the estimates in 2024 dollars.

Table 1 - Cost estimates based on cost category, type of injury and unit of measurement

Cost Categories	Costs/Unit (2024 dollars)		
	No-Bodily Harm	Non-fatal Injury	Fatal Injury
Police Costs (per incident)	\$1,630	\$8,378	\$228,215
Criminal Justice costs (per arrest)	\$492	\$1,348	\$44,318
Incarceration* (per arrest)	\$73,789	\$105,413	\$750,671
Medical costs** (per victim)	N/A	\$32,901	\$22,104
Work loss/ Productivity*** (per victim, ages 18 to 64)	N/A	\$1,464	N/A
Loss of quality of life**** (per victim)	N/A	\$62,351	\$13,914,979

*Assumes the average time spent in prison for an assault is 2.5 years and 17.8 years for a homicide (Kaeble, 2021). In addition, it is assumed 65% of arrests result in a conviction (Chien, 2020).

** For fatal injuries, assume 26.7% die in an inpatient setting and 73.3% die in the ED (Miller et al, 2024).

*** Assumes the average number of work days lost is 11.3 days (Peterson, Xu & Barnett, 2021).

****For non-fatal quality of life it is assumed 55% of injuries are treated in ED and 45% are treated in an inpatient setting (Miller et al., 2024).

Description of Costs

Police costs: If a firearm violence incident is reported, the local police respond. Police costs include the labor costs of responding to and investigating a crime such as controlling a crime scene, conducting interrogations and arrests, and appearing in court. In addition, there is the cost of the equipment involved, including police vehicles, weapons, communication systems and information technology (P. E. Hunt et al., 2019). For police costs, we relied on Hunt et al., (2019) which is frequently cited in gun violence cost analysis (Everytown Research & Policy, 2022; T. R. Miller et al., 2021; Santa Clara County Public Health, 2022). Hunt et al., (2019) examined average variable costs based on police expenditure data and incorporated studies examining the amount of time spent for different types of crimes (Houston Police Department: Operational Staffing Model, 2014; Schlueter et al., 2011). Cost estimates are provided for the nation and by state.

Criminal Justice costs: Once there is an arrest, the costs associated with the legal system become involved. For this report, criminal justice costs include court administration, and public defenders and prosecutors. Hunt et al., (2017) takes a similar approach to the methods they included in the development of police costs - examining variable costs and incorporating the proportion of time spent by crime type. Cost estimates are provided for the nation and by state.

Incarceration costs: Once convicted, an offender is sent to prison. Costs associated with incarceration are typically based on state budgets for prisons, divided by the number of individuals imprisoned. USA Facts provides data from 2021 on the cost of prisons by state (USA Facts, 2024). Average time served is based on data from the US Dept of Justice from 2018 indicating the average time served for a homicide is 17.8 years, and 2.5 years for an assault (Kaeble, 2021). Since we do not have conviction data, the research team assumed that 65% of cases result in a conviction based on state data included in 'America's Paper Prisons: The Second Chance Gap' (Chien, 2020). We do not separately account for costs of jail time (time spent in the county jail while

awaiting trial). We assumed that jail time would be incorporated into the final sentence and actual time spent in prison.

Medical Costs: For victims of firearm violence who sustain non-fatal or fatal injuries there are the initial hospital costs associated with the event. Victims enter the hospital system through the emergency department (ED), and, if necessary, are then admitted into inpatient care. In addition, our model includes costs associated with the injury for a year following the initial event such as outpatient procedures, office visits, ED visits, mental health visits, and pharmacy services. Medical transport and coroner's fees (for fatal injuries only) are also included. For both fatal and non-fatal injuries we relied on Peterson et al., (2021) as they provided a one-year time frame and use data from both the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (hospital data) and Insurance claims data (outpatient data). The CDC also relies on Peterson et al., (2021) for calculation of medical costs associated with various types of injuries, including injuries from firearms (WISQARS cost of Injury). For fatal injuries, individuals may die in the ED, or after being admitted to, higher cost, inpatient care. We assume approximately 74% of fatal injuries only use ED services with the balance being admitted to inpatient care (G. F. Miller et al., 2024).

Mental health: The trauma of being a victim of firearm violence can be long lasting, as well as impacting family members. For this analysis, mental health visits for the victim, but not family members, are incorporated into the estimation of medical costs from Peterson et al., (2021).

Employer productivity loss: Work/productivity loss includes the loss of productivity due to a firearm injury. For these costs, wages represent the dollar estimate of lost productivity from missed days at work. Based on existing literature (Peterson, Xu, & Barnett, 2021), the average number of days lost due to injuries that are initially treated in the ED is 11.3 days, and the average income for an individual in Fayetteville is \$142 per day (US Census, 2024). This cost was applied to victims who were of working age (18 to 64).

Quality of life: Quality of life is a way of assigning a value to how a person's life is changed as a result of an injury both in terms of quality and longevity of a life and is commonly used to evaluate medical treatments and interventions (Prieto & Sacristán, 2003). We rely on values determined in G.F. Miller et al., (2022) which incorporated the assessments of an expert panel of physicians to determine the impairment from an injury from a gun based on the location of injury and the Value of Statistical Life (VSL) - based on the amount people are willing to pay to save a life as well as other valuation methods (Peterson, 2021). These Quality of life valuations are consistent with what the CDC uses for their calculation of costs associated with injuries.

Unrepresented costs: The costs presented here are not all inclusive of the costs associated with firearm violence. Firearm violence can have wide and long-lasting effects that may not be represented in these cost estimates. While mental health costs related to the victim are included (part of medical costs), mental health costs related to family members and community members are not included. In terms of medical costs, the largest jump in costs tends to occur right after the event happens (Song et al., 2022). The initial medical costs and those through the first year are estimated and included, however, firearm victims may be reliant on ongoing medical care beyond the first year which are not included here. We could not identify a good, current proxy for lost wages, so while we include the employer's productivity loss we do not have lost wages (which would require estimating disability pay) for the victim.

In addition, there are costs that are not directly related to the incidents that are not included. There are many prevention and intervention programs that have been established to minimize firearm violence that are not accounted for in these estimates. We do not consider work-loss for perpetrators. Support programs for victims and their family, and programming to support offenders when they complete their sentences are not included. Lastly, there are unmet needs of survivors for resources which are not accounted for. Some victims may face barriers to treatment, particularly mental health treatment, such as stigma, lack of available resources and financial constraints (Everytown Research & Policy, 2024; Magee et al., 2023).

PRE-FOCUS GROUP SURVEY – DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

1. Are you 18 years or older?

- i. Yes
- ii. No

2. Which area below do you live in, or where do you spend a lot of time?

- i. Cliffdale
- ii. Murchson
- iii. Massey Hill
- iv. None of the above

3. How long have you lived in or been visiting [area]?

Please write the number instead of the word (i.e., 1 instead of one).

- i. ____ years
- ii. ____ months

4. What state do you currently live in? [text box]

5. What is your zip code? [require numerical answer]

6. What is your gender?

- i. Woman
- ii. Man
- iii. Trans man/masculine
- iv. Trans woman/feminine
- v. Nonbinary/Genderqueer/Agender
- vi. Another gender not listed:

7. What is your race? [Select all that apply]

- i. American Indian or Alaska Native
- ii. Asian
- iii. Black or African American
- iv. Middle Eastern/Arab
- v. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- vi. White
- vii. Hispanic or Latino/a/e
- viii. Self describe:

8. Do you or have you formerly worked in any of the following professions (please check all that apply)?

- i. Military
- ii. Law enforcement
- iii. Prisons or jails
- iv. Private security
- v. Hunting/sporting/outdoors professions that may involve firearms.
- vi. None of the above

9. What is your date of birth?

- i. Month
- ii. Day
- iii. Year

10. What is the highest level of education you finished?

- i. Less than high school
- ii. High school/GED
- iii. Some college
- iv. Associates degree (2 year equivalent)
- v. Bachelor degree (4 year equivalent)
- vi. More than bachelor degree

TABLE OF FOCUS GROUP THEMES BY RESEARCH QUESTION

	Reported as current context of community	Reported as something that needs to be addressed/facilitated	Context
Risk Factors & Community Challenges			
Negative neighborhood perceptions	X	X	Relates to disinvestment, ignores neighborhood strengths.
Neighborhood historical disinvestment	X	X	Limitations in resources for good quality of life.
Easy gun access & exposure	X	X	Youth can access guns without appropriate training or social-emotional skills.
Age (youth)	X	X	Youth drive gun violence (and is influenced by various individual and community factors).
Protective Factors & Community Strengths			
Credible & positive role models	X	X	The community has potential role models that could be connected with youth.
Social-emotional (SE) skills		X	Quick and over-reactions plus guns can lead to lethal outcomes.
Community cohesion	X	X	Some focus groups reported strong cohesion, some reported it as lacking.
Neighborhood historical roots	X		Historical elements were a point of pride.
Restorative practices		X	Some noted the need for holistic re-entry and approaches.
Current resources and growth	X	X	Participants highlighted current resources, like parks and schools.
Community policing practices		X	There's a desire for more community-oriented policing.

QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

In partnership with members of thegrouptheory, Inc. team, a Fayetteville-based community outreach organization, seven focus group discussions were conducted – two discussions per neighborhood area and an additional focus group of young adults (ages 18 to 24) across all neighborhoods. Participants were recruited at local public spaces (e.g., recreation centers) and in-person events, as well as through flyer distribution, listservs, and word of mouth. Discussions took place between December 2024 and July 2025. Participants also completed pre-discussion questionnaires to describe our qualitative sample.

Pre-Discussion Questionnaire

The pre-discussion questionnaire asked demographic questions as well as questions related to firearm attitudes and beliefs.

Two concepts from a research measure of gun-related beliefs were included, specifically: (a) neighborhood factors/concerns, referring to frequency and perceived need of guns, and (b) gun presence, referring to the presence of gun owners (Wamser-Nanney et al., 2020). Response options for questions on this measure ranged from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate higher support/positivity towards guns.

Focus Group Discussion Content

Each focus group followed the same protocol. Questions about perceptions and experiences related to community strengths and challenges (e.g., “What’s your favorite part of this community?”), causes of violence (e.g., “What have you heard or seen as causes of gun violence in this area?”), and strategies to prevent violence (e.g., “What do you think the community could do to prevent violence in this area?”) were asked. Participants also reacted to the description of ShotSpotter.

Focus Group Analysis

Focus groups were recorded and transcribed word for word. The research team conducted inductive thematic analysis. First, transcripts were open-coded – words and phrases were assigned to transcript segments that summarized the data. A draft codebook – a set of these codes and how they

connect to one another – was developed. The team then applied the draft codebook to three transcripts and further revised the codebook. The team began to draft and discuss the key ideas in the data at this point. Then, the transcripts were uploaded to Dedoose (Version 9.0.107), a qualitative analysis software that allows teams to code transcripts. After two team members coded each transcript, each team member drafted themes based on their coded data. These themes were discussed and refined into the results reported here by RJG with review from FRC and JM.

Limitations

It is important to understand that any finding or takeaway from the Community Perspective section should be taken with the following considerations in mind:

- Qualitative studies are not designed to produce data that can be generalized across communities. The rich information described here is used to situate recommendations for prevention within the local context.
- While community perceptions and experiences offer invaluable information for shaping community planning, perceptions should be cross-checked across varied forms of data to shape decision making.
- The average age of the focus group participants was 42. This is important context for reading findings related to youth development and, while some participants in the 18-24 range also participated in focus groups, the relative skew of our focus group members could have influenced the particular assumptions and prevention plans.

