

The Providence Journal

Providence shootings, homicides continue to decline

Both categories continued to drop in 2016, and the city did not see a single gang-related homicide, a trend attributed to improved community policing.

By [Amanda Milkovits](#)

Journal Staff Writer

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PROVIDENCE, R.I. — There were fewer shootings and fewer homicides in Providence last year, continuing years of a steady decline in violent crime in the city.

The Providence police chief and executive director of the Institute for the Study and Practice of Nonviolence say the reduction of violence in 2016 actually reflects years of work between the police and the community they serve.

The number of shootings has decreased over the last five years, and with 68 victims last year, is reaching the level of nearly a decade ago. There were 11 homicides in 2016, which is tied with 2006 for the lowest number of homicides in about three decades, according to statistics from the Providence police.

Last year, there were no gang-related homicides — a first in recent memory. That is significant, as one gang killing can often lead to retaliation.

But, Chief Hugh T. Clements Jr. said, a combination of police strategy and partnerships with community organizations and other law enforcement agencies has helped them stop retaliatory shootings.

"We continued to be focused on gun crimes, gangs and groups," Clements said. "We're intelligence-driven and data-driven. It's predictive policing. We know the next group to be in battle." And, he said, those who are likely to shoot or be shot.

That strategy has led Providence police to seize 160 firearms in crimes last year — well over the usual gun seizures — and arrest 47 gang members on gun charges.

Having a full year without a gang homicide has also helped ease the tensions in a long-standing, deadly feud between two rival groups in the city, said Institute executive director PJ Fox. The members of both sides are eager to let the feud go, he said, and the cessation of gang-related deaths "lets the wounds heal a little bit."

As the police became strategic, so did the Institute, by employing more street workers to reach out to people who are involved in violent conflicts, assess their needs and follow through on helping them with counseling, mentorships and employment, Fox said.

The Institute is adding a team at three middle schools to reach youths who may be vulnerable to joining a violent group. "If you come at it from all different places, at some point, a young person is going to hear the message," Fox said.

There are still volatile situations that flare up, Fox said. However, "although people still get heated and can't see a way out, something else has taken over," he said. "Groups don't want this anymore. They're ready to move on."

— amilkovi@providencejournal.com

Providence Homicides

1998	23
1989	28
1990	31
1991	19
1992	18
1993	24
1994	23
1995	25
1996	17
1997	12
1998	15
1999	26
2000	30
2001	23
2002	23
2003	20
2004	18
2005	23
2006	11
2007	14
2008	13
2009	24
2010	16
2011	12
2012	17
2013	14
2014	19
2015	15
2016	11

Source: Providence Police Department