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## Homicides Subside: Peacefulness Gradually Returning to Minneapolis at End of 2020

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### Introduction

The Minneapolis Effect is a concept invented by criminologists, similar to the Ferguson Effect. It describes a phenomenon linking the increase in the homicide rate to police disengagement after citizens' protest of perceived illegitimate killings of minority raced suspects (Cassell, 2020a). It is a counter-narrative to that of citizens proffering an anti-police misconduct claim and charges of racism. A main proponent of the Ferguson Effect predicted dire consequences to communities over the next few years as a result of its impact (2020a).

Indeed, the recent increases in homicide in Minneapolis appeared to begin in concert with the death of George Floyd who was killed by police on May 25, 2020 (Memorial Day). The day after his murder, civil unrest ensued, and homicides appeared to spike. An additional assertion of the Minneapolis Effect is that homicides would appear suddenly, and subsequently become widespread (Cassell, 2020b). While the effect claim does include the generic category of crime, this current analysis mostly emphasizes the trend of homicidal violence.

Great interest has been paid in recent years to the causes of crime reductions (called the crime drop) in U.S. cities. Understanding the rise and fall of homicide victimization is important to identifying the cause and therefore prevention of homicide. Likewise, blame for the increase in violence can be extremely stigmatizing to both to the police, and to the protestors of police misconduct and racism. This stigmatization exacerbates mistrust and erodes perceived legitimacy of the police and has been identified as contributing to the cycle of violence in our cities (Desmond, Papachristos, and Kirk, 2016). While the tactics of protestors are also stigmatized, a decline in perceived police legitimacy further aggravates and grows the protest movement.

Although the phrase Minneapolis Effect has been coined, there is uncertainty whether the empirical data might actually support this claim. The effect is not simply the size effect of the homicide increase but linking its causation to police inactivity. Secondly, the claim of such an effect predicts that these homicides became widespread

outside of the city from where unrest originally began. Although a data analysis by Hilsonrath (2020) seems to support this claim, it is unclear whether the cities he analyzed evidenced homicide increases that were due to a spurious relationship with their own local police-violence, or even from Covid quarantine restlessness. Temperature variation has also been suggested as a correlate. A third question is whether the Minneapolis Effect, if it exists has yet ended, or to predict when it will end, or how long it will last. This present analysis will not attempt to evaluate the distance of any such effect, though it seems apparent that it may be global, with homicides and violent crime rising internationally (Harrington, 2020; The Local fr, 2020) and protests occurring in distant countries against police killings including Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa (Houeix, 2020; Olukoya, 2020).

Several theories have been posed globally in an attempt to explain the increase in violence. In France, the focus has been on domestic violence and domestic homicide which is believed to have resulted from the pandemic's stay-at-home order. In London, the rise is being blamed on restrictions put in place due to the Covid pandemic, which effectively limits typical forms of criminal enterprise like drug selling, thus leading to a loss of illegitimate income. A larger proportion of explanations track back to the issue of police misconduct and its resulting social unrest. In Minneapolis, some have tried to blame homicide increases on protests of police brutality and protestors' resultant efforts to defund the police, saying that this emboldens citizen criminal behavior. In 2019, police blamed increasing violence on a lack of staffing.

In Minneapolis so far in 2020, there have been 74 homicides from January 1st to November 17th. One of the 74 cases so far this year was not a criminal homicide, but instead a justified homicide. Last year (2019), for the complete year, only 41 criminal homicide cases occurred in the entire city, a 33-case increase thus far. This would indicate that the epidemic of homicides is real, at least for the city of Minneapolis, though the cause is unclear. Serious crimes, however, rose 70% in one Minneapolis neighborhood (called Downtown East) in 2019, well prior to the May 2020 civil unrest. These crimes included "robbery, burglary, and assault," but homicide counts were not mentioned specifically in this report and many neighborhoods showed serious violence decreased or remained steady. The Northside which historically experiences the highest homicide rate was declining at the end of 2019 (Jany & Webster, 2020).

Considering the increase in violent crimes other than homicide, some violent crimes that are increasing had been rising prior to the civil unrest and the Covid-19 pandemic. As early as September 2019, a substantial share of the recreational violence in Minneapolis was already underway and being publicly reported on and discussed. This included the large group assaults on lone individuals in the downtown entertainment district, which reflected a generalized mayhem (Nelson, 2019; Jimenez, Meilhan, & Waldrop, 2019).

Other non-violent crime types have been suggested as proof of increased lawlessness but lacks empirical rigor. For instance, an alleged carjacking spike has been mostly anecdotal up to this point. Although carjackings are reportedly "high" (63 instances) in September-October of 2020, Minneapolis Police did not start tracking such crimes specifically until September 22, 2020 (Sawyer, 2020). Police reported 375 carjackings by December 2, 2020, as determined by a manual retrospective tabulation. This amounts to 1.1 carjackings per day, and although it appears high, the percentage increase over last year is likely due to extremely low 2019 numbers (which were never tabulated). While carjackings have increased, their characterization could be considered part of a 'carjacking panic' and appeared to buttress the argument in favor of adding additional police officers, described as "a critical shortage" by

police (Jimenez, Meilhan, & Waldrop, 2019). Similar to burglaries, numerous carjackings can be committed by a very small number of offenders and are not the result of any crime wave.

An alleged wave of street racing has also been identified as proof of crimes out of control. Minneapolis Police issued many citations recently, but the actual number is unknown due to conflating their own activity with that of “surrounding suburbs.” So, it is not clear how many of those 29 citations were actually issued in Minneapolis. Instead, the street racing data was characterized by police as somehow “more egregious” without providing Minneapolis specific data (Associated Press, 2020, 1). Street racing is not a new problem in the Twin Cities. Indeed in 2019, street racing was already identified as emerging in the suburb of Mendota Heights, Minnesota, with over 100 motor vehicles participating and reports of an officer being struck by one racer (Fox 9 KMSP, 2020).

Homicide was also up across the entire state for 2020 over 2019 numbers, thereby escaping the confines of the city for this so-called Minneapolis Effect. Days wherein homicides occur are considered disruptions in “peacefulness.” While shootings are also high in the city, homicide is considered a better indicator of the direction violence is heading, either increasing or decreasing. Shootings which numbered in the range of 500 by November 17th, were too high in number to be able to display temporally. The beauty of tracking “peacefulness” is that it illustrates the distribution of violence across the year in a highly visual way using a manageable sized dataset.

Concerning nonfatal to fatal shootings, Minneapolis had a ratio of 6.7 woundings to killings as of November 17, in 2020 with 507 gunshot wound victims reported by police (Minneapolis Police, 2020). However, it is unclear whether fatal wounds were included in this count. Academics have long estimated there are between three and six times more intentional gunshot woundings than there are killings (Annest, Mercy, Gibson, & Ryan, 1995; Cook, 1985; Cook, 1991; McGarrell, Hipple, Huebner, & O'Brien, 2019; Zawitz, 1996). This ratio is highly influenced by many factors that can impact the lethality of a homicidal event. These include: the number of shooters, the motivation and determination of the shooter, weapon type and caliber, shooter training and accuracy, or even the speed, location, and quality, of medical care. Indeed, researchers have recognized that the ratio of nonfatal-to-fatal firearm injuries have been increasing in the U.S. since at least 2011 (Jena, Sun, & Prasad, 2014), and in some cities while shootings may be rising, homicides are declining. While nonfatal shootings in Minneapolis appear somewhat high, it is very likely a majority of these shootings clustered in and around the time of the civil unrest as police withdrew from many parts of the city (Bailey, 2020; Dumas, 2020). Further research will be needed to clarify this claim.

## Methodology

The strategy for this analysis, not only creatively displays the data from descriptive statistics, it also assists with pattern identification, while suggesting possible correlates. Plotting of the intervals of peacefulness allow for a fine-grained analysis of the homicide trend. Homicide Center researchers collected published documents from Minneapolis area media publications (both television and print) to construct a simple dataset. This database included *victim name, incident address, and date of the 'murderous assault.'* Additional cases were identified and added to the dataset using open-source data collection including from subscription databases such as NewsLibrary. The resulting dataset included only homicide incidents from January 1, 2020 until November 17, 2020. A comparison dataset for 2019 was also prepared.

Data was cleaned of errors in part using press releases from the Medical Examiner’s Office. For instance, cases were reviewed to determine the true date of the assaultive injury. This was necessary because the date a body was discovered has little theoretical significance for investigating patterns for peaceful intervals or homicide prevention. Death dates are simply the result of the lethality of the weapon, or the quality and accessibility to medical care. If the date of the murderous assault was not known, it was possible the date the body was found was used, as is routine during Minnesota death certificate certification.

Justifiable homicides are routinely included in aggregations of criminal homicides because, theoretically, an intentional death would have occurred regardless of which party killed the deceased. All justifiable homicides were clearly marked in all capital letters in the dataset. The death of George Floyd has not yet been ruled justifiable. Therefore, in our data, we have counted George Floyd’s death as a criminal homicide, due to no current ruling that it was considered justified.

Seemingly accidental deaths are also classified as criminal intentional murders under the felony homicide rule if the driver of the motor vehicle in a police chase was fleeing a lawful order to stop. This is called constructed culpability. Police routinely charge these drivers, if they live, with criminal homicide, even in the deaths of their own passengers.

As a result of these criteria differences, exact homicide counts between reporting agencies (police, journalists, state health department vital records, crime researchers) can and do vary, though not dramatically.

The level of analysis chosen for this evaluation is the victim. This was because the difference between victim and incident level results were barely perceptible. Only eight days with multiple homicides occurred in Minneapolis during the period under investigation. We call these instances homicide exacerbations. In other words, homicide had intensified in speed and frequency during that brief period. However, these killings did not markedly impact the overall results.

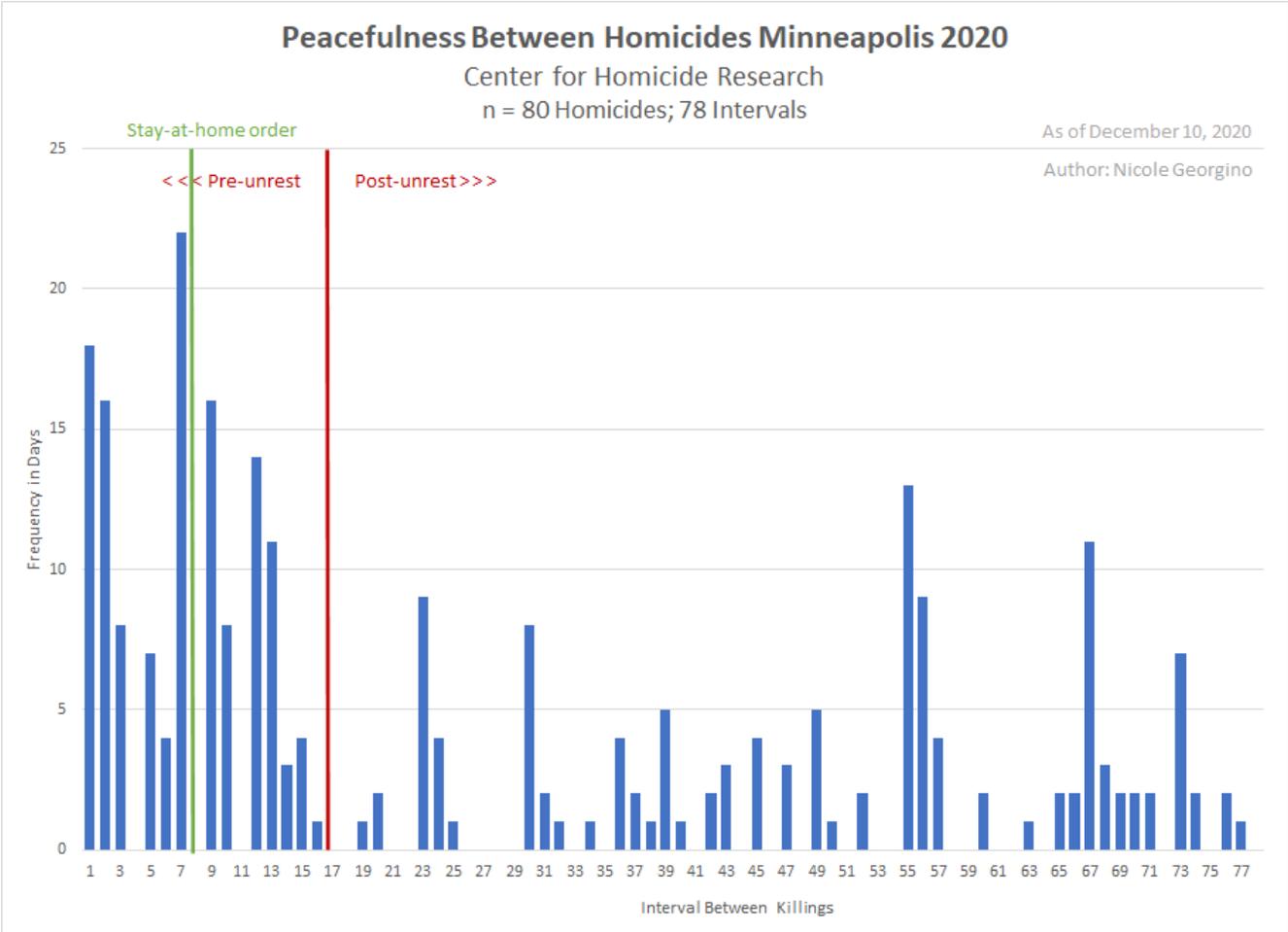
We computed the number of days between each killing and plotted them on a bar chart. The resulting intervals are characterized as peace intervals, or “peacefulness.” Reference lines were added to indicate when the State’s stay-at-home order was implemented (March 13<sup>th</sup>), and when the civil unrest began on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020. A second chart was created depicting only episodes of peacefulness since the civil unrest. A simple trend line was added indicating the overall direction of statistical change over time. It is a simple example of linear regression to the mean (arithmetic average), of the bar displays of data.

## **Results**

The data represents the intervals between homicides for 80 homicide victims. More than one homicide victim was killed on at least eight separate days, none of them being consecutive. No multi-victim days evidenced exceeding two murders in a single day. Intervals totaled 78 with a homicide bookending the span on the beginning and end of the data-period. The largest interval of peacefulness, or mode, occurred within interval seven and consisted of 22 days. As a reminder, these are the intervals of peacefulness thus far, ending on December 10, 2020.

Peacefulness was highest in the first five months of the year, after which, it dopped rapidly following the stay-at-home-order (which occurred March 13), or between interval seven and eight.

Peacefulness was decimated from the unrest, which occurred between intervals 16 and 17 and onward. Twenty-eight intervals evidenced zero days. The greatest run of zero-day intervals occurred in the fourth week of June and which could be described as an exacerbation of homicide. A trendline added to the chart of *post-civil* unrest indicated that, through December 10, the intervals of peacefulness progressing forward are steadily increasing.



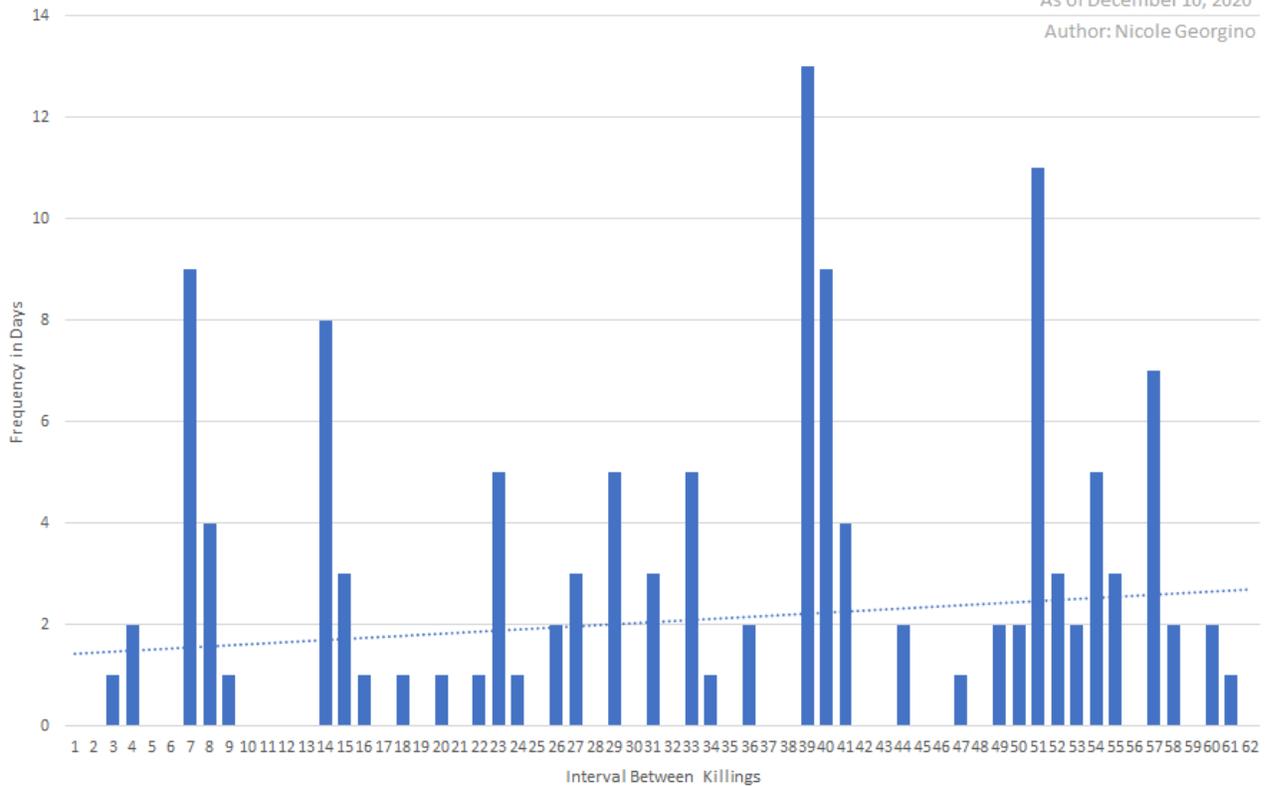
# Peacefulness Between Homicides Post-unrest Minneapolis 2020

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n = 64 Homicides; 62 Intervals

As of December 10, 2020

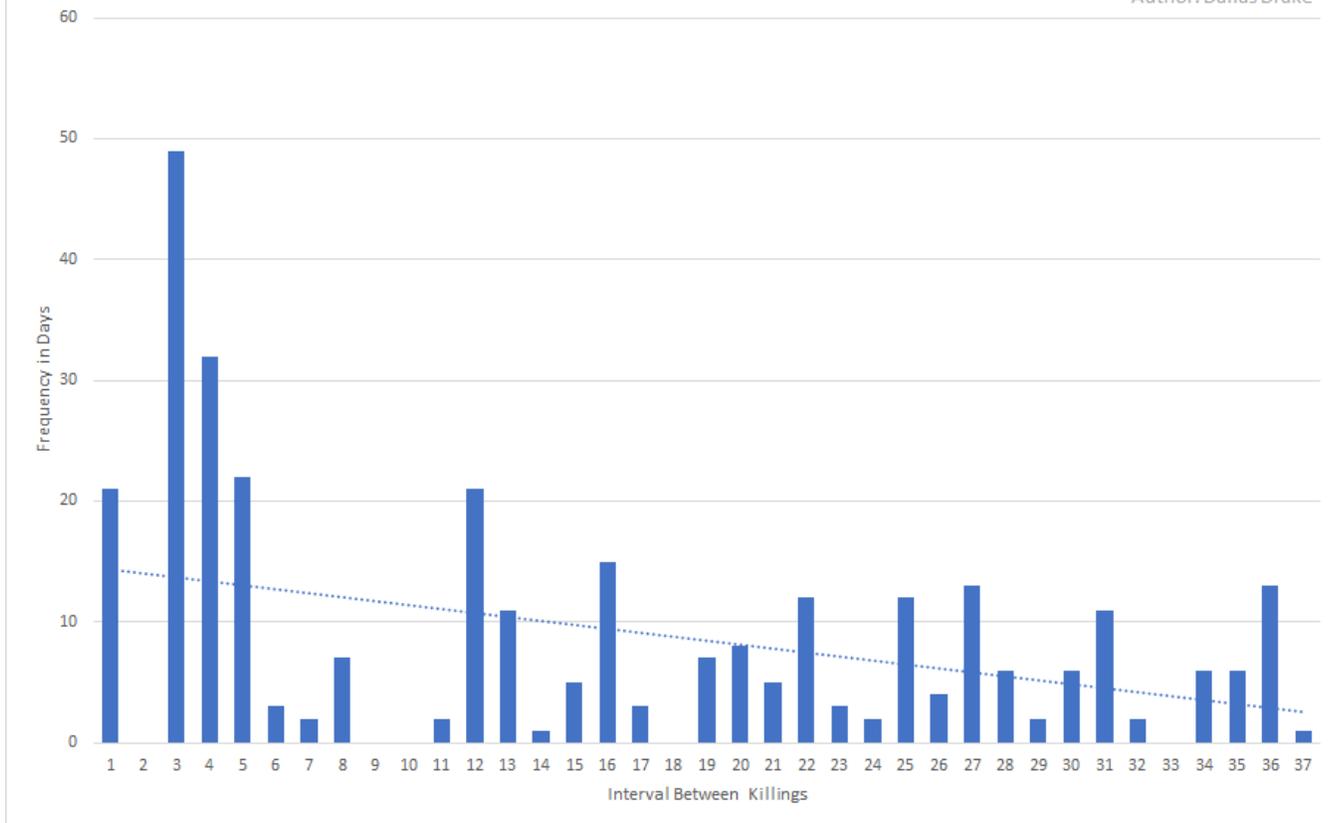
Author: Nicole Georgino



## Peacefulness Between Homicides in Minneapolis 2019

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n = 39 homicides; 37 Intervals

Author: Dallas Drake



Minneapolis homicides in 2019 by comparison shows a slight general trend of increasing peacefulness as incidence progresses toward the end of the year. This included 39 homicides with 37 intervals. The first interval of the year was not properly bookended due to the last homicide of 2017 not being identified.

The 2019 Minneapolis data illustrates a negation of the possible argument of a temperature impact during summer months as being the cause of the 2020 increase in end-of-the-year peacefulness. The expectation would have been an increase in peacefulness in the cooler months of October, November, and December, but this did not occur.

### Discussion

Prior to the civil protests against police shootings of African American men, Minneapolis was experiencing a dramatic decline in most crime types. Homicides and shootings were a rare exception (Corley, 2020), but these too increased as part of a national trend (Thornton, Sgueglia, & Levenson, 2020). Homicide has long been considered the most serious indicator of any overall crime trend, though some crime types may be driven by specific contextual factors. The upward trajectory of violent encounters occurred well before the civil unrest began.

Although Minneapolis started out calm in 2020, peacefulness was on a dramatic decline since the day of the Covid Pandemic 'stay-at-home order.' Violent crime had begun to surge. The death of

George Floyd by Minneapolis Police officers brought metro-wide violence to a crescendo with rioting, looting, and burning. But ever since May 26, 2020, the first night of the violent unrest, peacefulness has been slowly returning to the city, despite the alleged loss of several hundred police officers due to resignations, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) claims, and the Police Union's own admission of a decrease in proactive or self-initiated policing behavior in response to criticisms against police for shooting African American men (Chapman, 2015; Williams & Collins, 2020). To be sure, policing slowdowns were alleged by the command staff of the Minneapolis Police following "intense criticism" after the police shooting of Jamar Clark in 2016 (Jany, 2016, 1). There is no evidence or allegations of any slowdown in other areas of the Minneapolis police force, such as in investigations, or within police administration, though Nix & Wolfe (2018) found that some managers reported via self-report having felt impacted years earlier because of the Ferguson Effect.

Police patrol disengagement has been identified in other states as leading to violent crime surges. In a similar phenomenon, the Ferguson Effect was first described by St. Louis police chief Sam Dotson to describe the process of police abandoning proactive police activity and its resultant increase in violence. Coined by MacDonald (2015), the Ferguson Effect blamed the rise in homicides across many cities as being caused by a reduction in proactive policing in response to civil unrest in Ferguson, a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri, following the police killing of Michael Brown. To be clear, MacDonald defends the police killings of black suspects, arguing that "the strongest predictor of whether a police officer uses force is whether a suspect resists arrest" and that these shootings are "provoked."

Despite any initial Minneapolis Effect (slowdown by police patrol units) that may have occurred, homicides in Minneapolis appear to be gradually returning toward pre-pandemic levels. While homicides and shootings were higher this year than in the past, most incidents occurred and were clustered in the weeks immediately following the stay-at-home order. Homicides and shootings are not increasing throughout the year. Reductions in homicide is occurring without any increases in police staffing, although other violent crime types may take longer to follow suit.

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