

We have been researching combined rates of traffic fatalities and homicides by strangers in 10 major metropolitan areas in other parts of the United States. In each instance thus far, danger in central cities has been less different than expected from their close-in suburbs. In each instance, in addition, some suburban and exurban counties have had the highest combined rates.

Combined traffic fatality and stranger homicide rates were higher in 44 of 78 counties than the average in their central cities during 1999, 2000, and 2001. The highest fatality rate counties were five or six times more dangerous than the cities with the lowest rates (Minneapolis and St. Paul). Eighteen counties were more dangerous than Dallas, the most dangerous city (Table 11.3).³⁵

In the Chicago metropolitan area, the combined traffic fatality and homicide-by-strangers death rates were higher in three of nine counties (DeKalb, Grundy, and Kendall) than in Chicago. In the Cincinnati area, fatality rates were higher than in the central city in 10 of 12 counties (Boone, Campbell, Gallatin, Grant, and Pendleton in

Table 11.3
Average Traffic Fatality and Homicide Rates in 10 U.S. Metropolitan Areas (1999-2001)

Jurisdictions in Each MSA Ordered by Population Density	Population	Rates per 10,000 Population					
		Persons Per Acre	Traffic Fatalities	Total Homicides	Homicides by Strangers	Traffic Fatalities and Homicides	Traffic Fatalities and Homicides by Strangers
Baltimore, MD PMSA	2,552,994						
Queen Anne's County	40,563	0.2	2.8	0.2	0.1	3.0	2.9
Carroll County	150,897	0.5	1.0	0.2	0.0	1.2	1.0
Harford County	218,590	0.8	1.3	0.2	0.0	1.6	1.3
Howard County	247,842	1.5	1.0	0.2	0.0	1.2	1.0
Anne Arundel County	489,656	1.8	1.0	0.2	0.0	1.3	1.1
Baltimore County	754,292	2.0	1.0	0.2	0.1	1.3	1.1
Baltimore City	651,154	12.6	0.8	0.2	0.8	1.0	1.6
Chicago, IL PMSA	8,272,768						
Grundy County	37,535	0.1	2.3	0.2	0.2	2.5	2.5
DeKalb County	88,969	0.2	1.5	0.2	0.1	1.7	1.6
Kendall County	54,544	0.3	2.0	0.1	0.2	2.0	2.1
McHenry County	260,077	0.7	1.2	0.1	0.0	1.2	1.2
Will County	502,266	0.9	1.2	0.3	0.0	1.5	1.2
Kane County	404,119	1.2	1.0	0.5	0.1	1.5	1.1
Lake County	644,356	2.2	0.9	0.2	0.0	1.1	0.9
DuPage County	904,161	4.2	0.6	0.1	0.0	0.7	0.6
Cook excluding Chicago City	2,480,727	5.4	0.7	0.3	0.0	1.0	0.7
Cook County	5,376,741	8.9	0.8	1.3	0.2	2.1	1.0
Chicago City	2,896,016	19.9	0.9	2.2	0.4	3.1	1.3

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Cincinnati, OH– KY–IN PMSA	1,646,395							
Pendleton County, KY	14,390	0.1	2.5	0.7	0.1	3.2	2.7	
Ohio County, IN	5,623	0.1	1.2	0.0	0.0	1.2	1.2	
Gallatin County, KY	7,870	0.1	1.7	0.4	0.1	2.1	1.8	
Brown County, OH	42,285	0.1	1.3	0.1	0.0	1.4	1.4	
Grant County, KY	22,384	0.1	2.5	0.6	0.1	3.1	2.7	
Dearborn County, IN	46,109	0.2	2.5	0.1	0.0	2.5	2.5	
Boone County, KY	85,991	0.5	1.2	0.2	0.0	1.3	1.2	
Clermont County, OH	177,977	0.6	1.5	0.1	0.0	1.6	1.5	
Warren County, OH	158,383	0.6	1.4	0.1	0.0	1.5	1.4	
Campbell County, KY	88,616	0.9	0.9	0.3	0.1	1.2	0.9	
Kenton County, KY	151,464	1.5	0.7	0.4	0.1	1.1	0.8	
Hamilton excluding Cincinnati	514,018	2.4	0.7	0.2	0.0	0.9	0.8	
Hamilton County, OH	845,303	3.2	0.7	0.5	0.1	1.2	0.8	
Cincinnati City	331,285	6.7	0.7	1.0	0.2	1.7	0.9	

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Cleveland–Lorain –Elyria, OH PMSA	2,250,871							
Ashtabula County	102,728	0.2	2.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	2.0	
Geauga County	90,895	0.4	1.5	0.0	0.0	1.5	1.5	
Medina County	151,095	0.6	1.5	0.0	0.0	1.5	1.5	
Lorain County	284,664	0.9	0.9	0.1	0.0	1.0	0.9	
Lake County	227,511	1.6	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.5	
Cuyahoga excluding Cleveland	915,575	3.8	0.5	0.1	0.0	0.6	0.5	
Cuyahoga County	1,393,978	4.8	0.6	0.6	0.1	1.2	0.7	
Cleveland City	478,403	9.7	0.8	1.6	0.3	2.3	1.1	
Dallas, TX PMSA^a	3,519,176							
Henderson County	73,277	0.1	2.5	0.6	0.1	3.1	2.6	
Kaufman County	71,313	0.1	3.9	0.9	0.2	4.8	4.1	
Hunt County	76,596	0.1	3.6	0.3	0.1	3.9	3.6	
Ellis County	111,360	0.2	2.6	0.4	0.1	3.0	2.7	
Rockwall County	43,080	0.5	1.3	0.0	0.0	1.3	1.3	
Denton County	432,976	0.8	1.1	0.1	0.0	1.2	1.1	
Collin County	491,675	0.9	1.0	0.1	0.0	1.1	1.0	
Dallas County	2,218,899	3.9	1.2	1.2	0.2	2.3	1.4	
Dallas City	1,188,580	5.7	1.4	1.9	0.4	3.3	1.8	
Dallas Cnty excluding Dallas city	1,097,768		0.8	0.3	0.1	1.2	0.9	

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Houston, TX PMSA^P	4,177,646						
Chambers County	26,031	0.1	5.1	0.4	0.1	5.5	5.2
Liberty County	70,154	0.1	3.4	0.4	0.1	3.8	3.5
Waller County	32,663	0.1	3.3	0.6	0.1	3.9	3.4
Montgomery County	293,768	0.4	2.2	0.5	0.1	2.6	2.3
Fort Bend County	354,452	0.6	0.9	0.3	0.1	1.2	1.0
Harris County	3,400,578	3.1	1.2	0.9	0.2	2.1	1.4
Houston City	1,953,631	5.7	1.2	1.3	0.3	2.5	1.5
Harris excluding Houston	1,480,789		1.1	0.4	0.1	1.4	1.1
Milwaukee- Waukesha, WI PMSA	1,500,741						
Washington County	117,493	0.4	1.6	0.1	0.0	1.6	1.6
Ozaukee County	82,317	0.6	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.9
Waukesha County	360,767	1.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.7
Milwaukee County	343,190	3.7	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.4	0.3
Milwaukee County	940,164	6.1	0.5	1.4	0.3	1.9	0.8
Milwaukee City	596,974	9.7	0.6	2.1	0.4	2.7	1.1

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Minneapolis– St. Paul, MN–WI MSA	2,968,806						
Pierce County, WI	36,804	0.1	2.0	0.1	0.0	2.1	2.0
Isanti County, MN	31,287	0.1	1.4	0.1	0.0	1.5	1.4
St. Croix County, WI	63,155	0.1	2.6	0.0	0.0	2.6	2.6
Chisago County, MN	41,101	0.2	1.8	0.2	0.0	1.9	1.8
Wright County, MN	89,986	0.2	1.2	0.1	0.0	1.3	1.2
Sherburne County, MN	64,417	0.2	1.1	0.1	0.0	1.1	1.1
Carver County, MN	70,205	0.3	1.7	0.2	0.0	1.9	1.7
Scott County, MN	89,498	0.4	1.5	0.1	0.0	1.5	1.5
Washington County, MN	201,130	0.8	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.7
Dakota County, MN	355,904	1.0	0.8	0.1	0.0	0.9	0.8
Anoka County, MN	298,084	1.1	0.8	0.2	0.0	1.1	0.9
Hennepin excluding Minneapolis	733,582	2.3	0.5	0.3	0.0	0.7	0.5
Hennepin County, MN	1,116,200	3.1	0.5	0.5	0.1	1.0	0.5
Ramsey excluding St. Paul	223,884	3.4	0.5	0.2	0.0	0.7	0.5
Ramsey County, MN	511,035	5.1	0.6	0.4	0.1	0.9	0.6
St. Paul City	287,151	8.5	0.7	0.5	0.1	1.2	0.7

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Philadelphia, PA– NJ PMSA	5,100,931							
Salem County, NJ	64,285	0.3	2.9	0.3	0.0	3.2	2.9	
Burlington County, NJ	423,394	0.8	1.2	0.2	0.0	1.3	1.2	
Chester County, PA	433,501	0.9	1.3	0.2	0.0	1.4	1.3	
Gloucester County, NJ	254,673	1.2	1.5	0.1	0.0	1.7	1.5	
Bucks County, PA	597,635	1.5	1.1	0.1	0.0	1.2	1.1	
Montgomery County, PA	750,097	2.4	0.8	0.1	0.0	0.9	0.8	
Camden County, NJ	508,932	3.6	0.9	0.6	0.1	1.5	1.0	
Delaware County, PA	550,864	4.7	0.6	0.4	0.1	1.0	0.7	
Philadelphia County/ City, PA	1,517,550	17.6	0.8	2.0	0.3	2.8	1.1	

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Pittsburgh, PA MSA	2,358,695						
Fayette County	148,644	0.3	1.3	0.1	0.0	1.4	1.3
Butler County	174,083	0.3	1.3	0.1	0.0	1.4	1.3
Washington County	202,897	0.4	1.3	0.1	0.0	1.4	1.4
Westmoreland County	369,993	0.6	1.2	0.1	0.0	1.3	1.2
Beaver County	181,412	0.7	1.2	0.1	0.0	1.3	1.2
Allegheny excluding Pittsburgh	947,103	2.2	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.7
Allegheny County	1,281,666	2.7	0.7	0.0	0.1	0.7	0.8
Pittsburgh City	334,563	10.0	0.8	0.1	0.2	0.8	1.0

MSA = Metropolitan Statistical Area; PMSA = Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area

^aAlthough small portions of the City of Dallas lie within Collin, Denton, and Rockwall Counties, all homicides and traffic fatalities within the City of Dallas were attributed to the much larger portion of the city within Dallas County.

^bAlthough small parts of Houston lie within Fort Bend and Montgomery Counties, homicides and traffic fatalities within the City of Houston were attributed to that part of the city within Harris County.

Sources: All population data: U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population and Housing 2000*. Data on acreage for each jurisdiction from 1990 census for certain cities, www.census.gov/population/censusdata/places, from 2000 census, www.census.gov, and from packet "Population Density of Central Cities and Counties and Metropolitan Areas." County fatality data from Fatality Analysis Reporting System Web site, query function, www.fars.nhtsa.dot.gov. Traffic fatality data are from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Traffic Safety Facts, www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/pdf/nrd-30/NCSA/TSFAnn/TSF1999.pdf, and 2000 and 2001; Uniform Crime Reports County Data. Retrieved November 2001-April 2003, from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/crime>. City Homicide data from Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Reports, www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm (1999, 2000, 2001). Uniform Crime Reports by some states as Pennsylvania, <http://ucr.psp.state.pa.us/UCR/Reporting/Monthly/Summary/MonthlySumHomiUI.asp>.

Kentucky; Brown, Clermont, and Warren in Ohio; and Dearborn and Ohio in Indiana). In Cleveland, three of six counties had higher combined fatality rates than the city (Ashtabula, Geauga, and Medina). In the Dallas area, the traffic and stranger homicide death rate was higher in Ellis, Henderson, Hunt, and Kaufman Counties than in the City of Dallas. In the Houston area, the combined death rate was higher in Chambers, Liberty, Montgomery, and Waller Counties than in the City of Houston. In the Minneapolis–St. Paul metropolitan area, the combined rate was higher in the counties of Anoka, Carver, Chisago, Dakota, Isanti, Pierce, Scott, Sherburne, St. Croix, and Wright than in the central cities. In the Philadelphia area, Chester, Gloucester, and Salem Counties had higher fatality rates than Philadelphia. In the Pittsburgh metropolitan area, the combined rate was higher in the counties of Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Washington, and Westmoreland than in the central city.³⁶ In the Baltimore and Milwaukee areas, only one county in each had higher combined rates than the central cities.

The relationship between low population density and danger becomes evident when all the metropolitan counties and cities are arrayed for the entire state of Virginia (Table 11.2). For the 14 jurisdictions with the highest combined rate of traffic fatalities and homicides by strangers, the highest population density was 0.2 persons per acre (143 persons or less per square mile). The jurisdiction with the highest population density, Alexandria, with 11.4 persons per acre, was the second safest jurisdiction in Virginia.³⁷

The common belief, of course, is the opposite—that danger and high density go together, and safety and low density are companions. This is not true in Virginia. For 27 counties with population densities from 0.1 to 0.9 persons per acre, the mean traffic fatalities and homicides by strangers was 5.2 per 10,000 residents (the median was 4.9). For the 23 cities and counties with population densities of 1.0 to 11.4 persons per acre, the mean was 1.9 (the median was 1.5).³⁸

Similar findings occurred in our study of traffic fatalities and homicides by strangers in 78 counties and 11 cities in 10 metropolitan areas (Baltimore, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dallas, Houston, Milwaukee, Minneapolis–St. Paul, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh). The 18 most dangerous jurisdictions were outer suburban counties with population densities of 0.1 to 0.4 persons per acre, with 11 of them at densities of 0.1 person per acre. The City of Dallas was next, the 19th most dangerous jurisdiction; it tied Houston as the lowest density central city, with 5.7 persons per acre (Table 11.3). In these 10 metropolitan areas, inner suburbs consistently were the least dangerous areas. One or more outer suburban counties consistently were the most dangerous areas, with outer suburban areas being particularly dangerous compared with inner areas in the Minneapolis–St. Paul, Pittsburgh, and Houston metropolitan areas. In the 39 counties with population densities from 0.1 to 0.9 persons per acre, the mean traffic fatalities and homicides by strangers were 1.9 (the median was 1.6), while for 30 cities and counties with densities from 1.0 to 19.9 persons per acre, the mean of fatalities was 1.3 (the median was 1.0).³⁹

Higher traffic fatality and stranger homicide dangers also occurred in the exurban counties of Baltimore and Philadelphia, in one-year samples for 2000, according to journalists for metropolitan publications. In January 2001, *The Baltimore Sun* reported findings for traffic fatalities and homicides by strangers in 2000: “[Baltimore] had a combined rate of 13.9 per 100,000 people (traffic fatalities and homicides by strang-

ers), only slightly higher than Prince George's 13.8 and Harford at 13.3. Howard County's was 11.9, Baltimore County's 11.6 and Anne Arundel County's 10.8. Queen Anne's, Charles and Frederick counties—fast-growing exurban areas that recorded a handful of homicides but high traffic death rates—all have combined rates that exceed those of Baltimore.⁴⁰ The most surprising aspect of the Maryland data was the small difference between the City of Baltimore, which had one of the five highest homicide rates in the nation in 2000,⁴¹ and the large suburban counties—Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard, and Prince George. The large number of traffic fatalities in those counties caused the small differences in overall safety.

In the Philadelphia area, *Philadelphia* magazine reported similar results: "Crunch the numbers, and it adds up to an average annual rate of about four homicides by stranger per 100,000 population in [Philadelphia], versus about nine auto fatalities per 100,000 in the four suburban counties. . . . a Chester County resident is now nearly four times more likely to die in a car crash than the average Philadelphian is to die at the hands of a violent criminal."⁴² Quoting Chester County Coroner Rodger Rothenberger, Noel Weyrich wrote: "Most of us in Chester County are in a vehicle at some point during each day, and it's probably the riskiest activity that we do."⁴³ Describing the outrage of Scott Piersol, town manager of East Brandywine, Weyrich noted that Piersol said: "Some of these people basically feel invulnerable . . . People put their makeup on driving down the road. I've seen that, and it just drives me nuts. These people might as well have a gun in their hand, shooting at people. They can do the same damage with their vehicle."⁴⁴