

GROUP VIOLENCE REDUCTION STRATEGY

COMMUNITY GUN VIOLENCE IS ONE OF THE MOST SERIOUS ISSUES FACING US CITIES TODAY.

It is not only responsible for thousands of deaths and injuries every month—it hinders education, limits the effectiveness of city services, drives disinvestment in neighborhoods, and destroys the trust of residents in their government. It is also an enormous engine of inequality—the consequences of violence fall particularly heavily on disadvantaged communities and communities of color.

We also have evidence that we can reliably reduce community gun violence in the near term. This brief is about an approach that has the strongest research track record of successfully reducing violence at a neighborhood level (and citywide). We refer to this approach as Group Violence Reduction Strategy (GVRS).

GVRS is not a boutique branded program. It is a set of management philosophies and a coordination of government and nonprofit efforts into a coherent system—one that leverages community violence intervention (CVI), social services, community leadership, police and prosecutors. The best of these strategies pursue three simultaneous goals:

- Reduce crime and violence in communities.
- Reduce arrests and improve outcomes for community members at highest risk of violent crime.
- Improve community-government relations.

Typically, police agencies and intervention organizations are not focused as rigorously as they could be on the very highest risk population—on people who are shooting and being shot right now. And different parts of government can have a difficult time working together effectively. A large share of community violence is from cycles of retaliation—this is something it is possible for government to stop with a shared strategy.

RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

PAGE TWO

In Baltimore, GVRS reduced homicides and shootings by 30% in 2022-2023 without displacing crime to other parts of the city or increasing arrests.

PAGE THREE

Eight randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and over 40 other studies provide an enormous body of research supporting GVRS's value for cities.

PAGE FOUR

In Stockton, GVRS resulted in a 40% reduction in violent victimization for treated gang members from 2019-2022. It also reduced arrests for violence by almost 40% and general crime by 25%.

PAGE SIX

We are developing better ideas on what cities need to do to implement strategies effectively.

HOW DOES GVRS DIFFER FROM CVI?

CVI (community violence intervention) programs provide direct support and resources to individuals at highest risk of violence. CVI is an essential component of any effective GVRS approach, **not a rival model**. While CVI has great potential, many studies suggest that CVI programs do not reduce violence at the city or community level when implemented in isolation. Community violence is a complex and durable problem that requires an approach involving the whole of government and community. Well-designed GVRS strategies include robust CVI programs, strong city-level management and strategic law enforcement.

HOW DOES THE STRATEGY WORK?

1

USE DATA.

Align and focus government to the nature of the problem, which is hyper-concentrated. Convene front-line workers to understand dynamics week-to-week.

2

COMMUNITY VOICE LEADS.

The first step is communication. Community leaders join outreach, saying “we are deeply concerned about your safety and the violence needs to stop.”

3

SERVICES AND SUPPORTS.

Relentless outreach and intensive mentorship meet people where they are and help them reduce their risk of harm.

4

STOP THE VIOLENCE.

People who continue to be engaged in violence need to be arrested and prosecuted to protect those in services and the broader community.

BALTIMORE GVRs

Historically, Baltimore has struggled with persistently high levels of gun violence. Between 2015 and 2022, it experienced more than 300 homicides and 630 non-fatal shooting victims yearly.

When Baltimore Mayor Scott was elected in 2020 on a platform to reduce gun violence, he named GVRs as his flagship strategy. After extensive planning and stakeholder engagements to ensure the strategy was tailored to local dynamics and values, as well as foundation building to create an appropriate city infrastructure for effective implementation, Baltimore City partners—including the Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (MONSE), the Baltimore Police Department (BPD), the State’s Attorney’s Office (SAO), partner law enforcement agencies, Youth Advocate Programs, Inc., Roca, Inc. and community “moral voices”—coalesced to pilot GVRs in January 2022 in the Western District—of the city’s nine police districts, its historically most violent, and among the most violent in the United States.

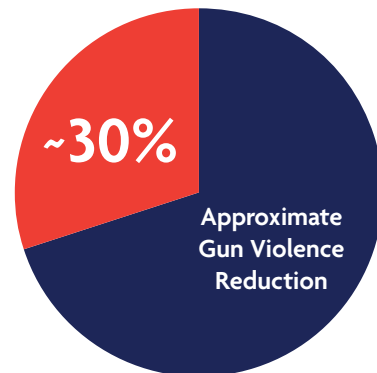
The experience in Baltimore reaffirms that GVRs requires a robust management and governance structure to translate high-level political authorization to effective implementation and results. This, in turn, requires intensive collaboration between executive leadership and operational managers in the Mayor’s Office, Baltimore Police Department, and State’s Attorney’s Office. Partners regularly gauge implementation health according to a set of evolving key performance indicators (KPIs) responsive to emergent operational challenges.

An independent evaluation by the University of Pennsylvania’s Crime and Justice Policy Lab (CJP) suggests that GVRs significantly improved the WD’s violence dynamics **during the first 18 months of implementation**, resulting in a 33% approximate gun violence reduction, 60 fewer victims, and a 33% approximate carjacking reduction.

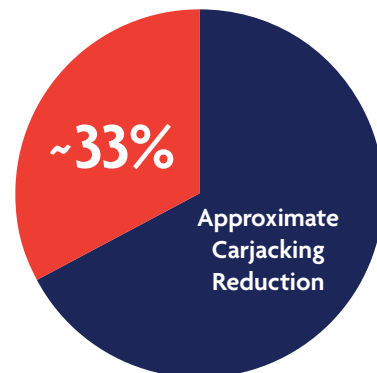
Importantly, the evaluation proved that GVRs achieved these results without displacing crimes to other parts of the city and, despite the important role played by police in this intervention, without increasing overall arrests or those for minor offenses.

Baltimore has continued to build on this positive momentum. The city closed 2023 with a nearly 22% reduction in homicides—the largest single-year drop in its history—ending the year with fewer than 300 shootings for the first time since 2015. Baltimore has carried reductions into 2024. As of August 31, homicides are down 30% and non-fatal shootings 37%, respectively. Additionally, Mayor Brandon Scott is poised to be re-elected, having won a competitive democratic primary. This will ensure continued executive support for GVRs, which now operates across four of Baltimore’s nine police districts. Baltimore must now focus on institutionalizing and sustaining this success, while continuing to expand the strategy citywide.

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60 ↓ Fewer Victims



GVRS RESEARCH TRACK RECORD

GVRS IS AN EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGY INFORMED BY:

1



51 RESEARCH STUDIES CONDUCTED BETWEEN 2001 AND 2024

2



14 studies in cities under 200,000;
12 in cities of 200,000 – 500,000;
23 in cities over 500,000;
2 multi-city studies

3



EIGHT TOTAL RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIALS (RCTS)

FOCUSED DETERRENCE OR GVRS?

GVRS is part of a larger family of strategies that are often collectively known as focused deterrence. The 51 studies highlighted on this page cover different types of focused deterrence, although all strategies share the same theory. GVRS is often the term for group-centered focused deterrence, although these types of strategies can have many names including Group Violence Intervention (GVI), Ceasefire, and Violence Reduction Initiative (VRI). 25 of 51 studies on focused deterrence specifically dealt with group-centered strategies similar to GVRS.

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF EVIDENCE

A new Campbell Collaborative systematic review of focused deterrence evidence is forthcoming; the previous version was published in 2018. Key takeaways from the new systematic review include:

- There is a strong track record of focused deterrence reducing violent crime.
- More recent studies have also shown that focused deterrence can reduce violent victimization and reduce violent recidivism among offenders.
- Many focused deterrence studies show that these reductions come with no increase in arrests and no displacement of crime to other places.
- Evidence for focused deterrence has expanded greatly in the last few years. The latest review adds 27 additional studies and eight randomized evaluations (RCTs)—often considered one of the most rigorous forms of evidence.

SELECT STUDY LOCATIONS:

- Baltimore, MD 2024 (page 2)
- New York City, NY 2024
- Philadelphia, PA 2024
- Detroit, MI 2021
- Oakland, CA 2019
- Kansas City, MO 2018
- New Orleans, LA 2015
- Boston, MA 2014
- Stockton, CA 2024 (page 4)
- San Francisco, CA 2024
- Tampa, FL 2022
- Rockford, IL 2019
- St. Louis, MO 2018
- New Haven, CT 2017
- Chicago, IL 2015
- Australia, Brazil, Israel, Sweden, and the United Kingdom

COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY

In 2024, CJP and California Partnership for Safe Communities published a comparative case study looking at differences between GVRS programs in Baltimore, MD; Indianapolis, IN; and Philadelphia, PA. That case study is available at crimejusticelab.org/publications/.



STOCKTON CEASEFIRE EVALUATION

Stockton Ceasefire Evaluation shows significant reductions in victimization, violent recidivism for highest-risk community members relative to rigorous comparison group.

BACKGROUND:

For almost a decade, the City of Stockton worked with the California Partnership for Safe Communities to develop and implement an evidence-informed approach to reducing community violence. The work began after Stockton became the largest U.S. city to declare bankruptcy at the time and subsequently set all time homicide records. Over the next several years, the city took a series of steps to redevelop a police department decimated by bankruptcy; to engage with community stakeholders deeply concerned about violence and to rebuild outreach and violence intervention capacity also gutted by the city’s financial crisis.

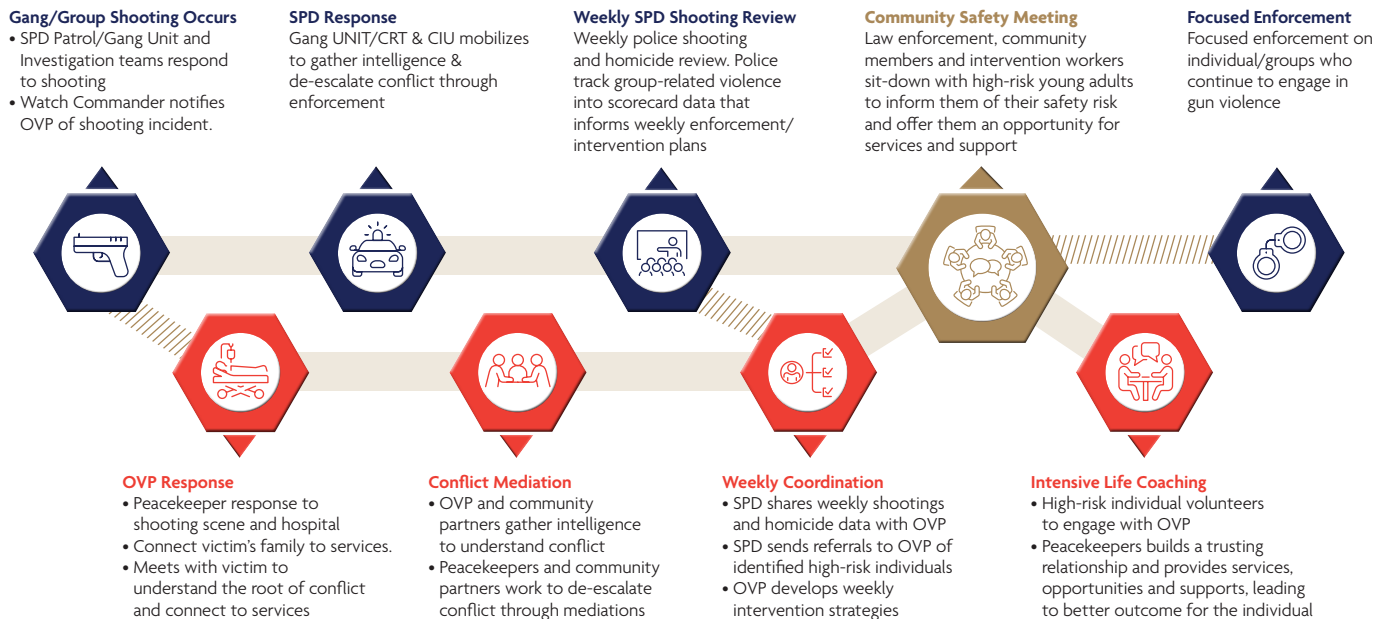
Under then Mayor Michael Tubbs’ and Chief Eric Jones’ leadership, the City of Stockton subsequently launched the Office of Violence Prevention with long-term public funding, rebuilt the Peacekeepers outreach program and developed a robust management team. At the same time, The Stockton Police Department undertook significant organizational changes, becoming the leading agency in an ambitious national police reform effort.

A RIGOROUS EVALUATION OF THIS STRATEGY BY THE CRIME AND JUSTICE POLICY LAB FOUND:

- **-40% reduction in shooting victimization** amongst 1,080 treated highest-risk community members (ceasefire participants); relative to a similar high-risk control group of untreated peers.
- **-37% reduction in violence recidivism and a -25% reduction in general recidivism (arrest)** amongst treated highest-risk community members; relative to a similarly high-risk control group of untreated peers. High risk individuals who were socially connected to Ceasefire participants (vicariously treated) also experienced **significant reductions in victimization (-49%)**.
- While Ceasefire was active, **monthly homicide counts in Stockton were reduced by -30%** relative to the 11 comparison cities during these same time periods.
- **Robust political support and a strong management system were essential components** in Stockton Ceasefire’s effectiveness and seemed to protect it in spite of various sources of strain and leadership turnover at various positions.

These findings are consistent with CPSC’s ongoing work on the **Key City Capacities to Reduce Community Violence framework**. For more information, go to page 6 and <https://thecapartnership.org/key-capacities/>

STOCKTON CEASEFIRE PROCESS SHOOTING RESPONSE BY SPD AND OVP INTERVENTION TEAM ● SPD PROCESS ● OVP PROCESS



COMMUNITY VIOLENCE PREVENTION

WHY AREN'T MORE CITIES MAKING PROGRESS ON THE PROBLEM OF COMMUNITY VIOLENCE?

Community violence prevention is an emerging field of public safety work that is focused on reducing and preventing shootings and homicides. US cities are becoming more aware of evidence-informed approaches, and have received historic levels of investment and political support from the federal government, but few cities have been able to sustainably reduce community violence at the city level through purposeful strategies. Here are some key reasons why:

Putting the right pieces into place can be difficult, and many cities underestimate the challenges.

Even with a champion mayor or city manager, many cities fail to generate or sustain progress on reducing violence. Outcomes within and across various models vary widely, often as a result of implementation challenges. A national review of city experiences and practitioner knowledge indicates that cities succeed in reducing violence when they build a limited set of local “key capacities.” (See page 6)

Cities can easily lose focus, but even good strategy requires consistent and constant effort.

Like all major violence reduction approaches, GVRs has been susceptible to inconsistent political support, insufficient infrastructure to ensure quality implementation, key personnel turnover, financial crises or budget cuts, and a lack of interagency and robust community partnership.

Failed “tough on crime” policies have created a backlash against active strategies.

Particularly in moments of spiking violence, politicians and vocal constituents can advocate for “tough on crime” policies, including aggressive, zero-tolerance policing and increased incarceration, that have been proven to be inadequate at reducing violent crime and have unintended harms in the most impacted communities. Some cities have pursued aggressive enforcement efforts and labeled them “GVRs” which has generated concerns and confusion among policy makers and community stakeholders.

It is a difficult leadership challenge to manage diverse voices and stakeholders. Many cities silo instead.

Research shows that GVRs is one of the most powerful approaches to address community violence because it represents a “whole of government and community approach” that is hyper-focused on the small number of people at the highest risk of being perpetrators and/or victims of violence. However, there is an inherent tension between police, community violence intervention organizations, and community members that must be skillfully managed and acknowledged when structuring these strategies.

City leaders and funders want to grab for easy branded solutions. Even the best programs can't do it all alone.

Elected leaders and community members can also be vulnerable to seeking “silver bullet” solutions that don't really exist. Rather than viewing community violence prevention as a program that cities can buy or fund and “plug in”, community violence is a durable problem that local government needs to prioritize, develop specific infrastructure to address, and then actively manages in partnership with community stakeholders.

KEY CITY CAPACITIES TO REDUCE COMMUNITY VIOLENCE

EVEN THE BEST STRATEGY IS ONLY AS GOOD AS THE QUALITY OF ITS IMPLEMENTATION.

But how do we understand something as complex as city-wide violence reduction—a subject where implementation is rarely studied rigorously? Many cities currently understand implementation through crude measures such as “number of police officers” or “dollars spent on community groups.” The Key Capacities Project is a practitioner-led effort to develop a better understanding of what governments need to do to be successful in their strategic violence reduction efforts.

THE PROJECT:

A team of practitioner experts and former government leaders worked with a diverse range of field experts and reviewed extensive research from a variety of disciplines to identify key capacities that may play essential roles in reducing community violence at the city level and over time.

THE SIX KEY CAPACITIES:

- 1 Political Governance**, where city leaders prioritize and commit to reducing community violence while holding agencies accountable;
- 2 Data-Informed Problem Analysis**, which uses data to identify high-risk individuals, contexts, and areas for targeted intervention;
- 3 Cross-Sector Collaboration on a Shared Strategy**, where government and community organizations align their efforts under a unified, evidence-based plan;
- 4 Effective Operational Management**, ensuring a formal management structure, team and process drive the citywide strategy;
- 5 Effective Violence Reduction Infrastructure**, including a robust CVI ecosystem and a police department focused on reducing violence and building legitimacy;
- 6 Sustainability and Institutionalization**, includes formal evaluation, long-term funding and co-governance with community stakeholders to sustain reduction efforts across political administrations.

REVIEW OF CITIES:

This project reviewed seven cities between 2005 and 2020—Baltimore, Boston, Cincinnati, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Oakland, and Philadelphia. These cities were assessed using a lens of the key capacities, with several clear takeaways: Cities with a stronger presence of key capacities were more successful in implementing long-term violence reduction strategies.

- Strong political governance was closely linked to effective operational management, with sustained funding, a clear theory of change, and organizational support being critical for building robust CVI ecosystems.



The evidence review began with a survey of impact evaluations for existing programs and models. A comprehensive public record review followed, covering media reports, violence prevention plans, Community Violence Intervention (CVI) initiatives, and policing strategy reports. Additionally, more than 50 field experts and practitioners were interviewed, and the interviews were coded and analyzed to determine the presence of key capacities and the effectiveness of initiatives. Lastly, violence trends, particularly homicide and aggravated assault rates, were examined to pinpoint the launch of each city’s main strategy and assess the strength of the key capacities.

CONTINUED ►

- Data-driven, collaborative policing also played a key role both operationally and politically.
- Scaling programs in larger cities often spurred creative adaptations, supported by strong management.
- Cities need to focus on building local capacities—especially through political governance, senior management, and cross-sector collaboration—rather than merely adopting specific violence prevention models. Sustainable violence reduction requires prioritization, infrastructure, and active management by city governments in partnership with community stakeholders.

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For more information and the full policy brief, go to:
<https://thecapartnership.org/key-capacities/>

KEY CAPACITIES FRAMEWORK



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