



Kansas City's Unrelenting and Unaddressed Homicide Problem

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By: Patrick Tuohey

Four years ago, when Kansas City's homicide rate was down, City leaders were eager to [let people know](#) .

"There is still work to do because even one homicide is too many," [Mayor] James said. "But I have faith in the collaborative and strategic approach of KC NoVa. This year's data tells us that so far we are making great strides in the right direction."

Fast forward to today—after years of a nation-leading spike in homicides ([currently #5 in the nation](#) with 108 in 2018 [as of this writing](#))—and those same people seem to want to deny any affiliation with policing. The mayor, whose role as a member of the police board was highlighted in 2014, seems to shrug off any role in policing today. In a [KCPT panel discussion](#) about the 50th anniversary of the Kansas City Race Riots, moderator Nick Haines raises a question about minority hiring in the police department, "Mayor, you're on the police commission." James responds, "Yes . . . and...?" to laughs from the audience. (Starts at 35:32.)

In a more recent press conference, Mayor James [complained bitterly about lack of gun control legislation](#) and political ideology in the state legislature. But as a recent [KSHB report on homicides](#) made clear, there is no evidence that Jackson County, Missouri, has significantly more gun ownership than, say, Johnson County, Kansas, or that gun ownership in Kansas City has increased over the same time frame that homicides have spiked. It's not the guns.

There is research, however, that indicates that [increasing the number of police officers does reduce crime](#) . KSHB's Andy Alcock makes that point in his report, too. In fact, according to FBI statistics, Kansas City has *fewer police officers per capita* than all other cities with high homicide rates. What's worse, since 2011, the number of uniformed police officers in Kansas City has *declined*.

As I laid out in a [Kansas City Star guest column](#) , no one in Missouri has more power over policing in Kansas City than the mayor's office. What is lacking is not power, but will. And until Kansas City leaders get serious about adopting policies and policing methods that actually contribute to reductions in violent crime, we are figuratively whistling past an ever-growing graveyard.

About the Author



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