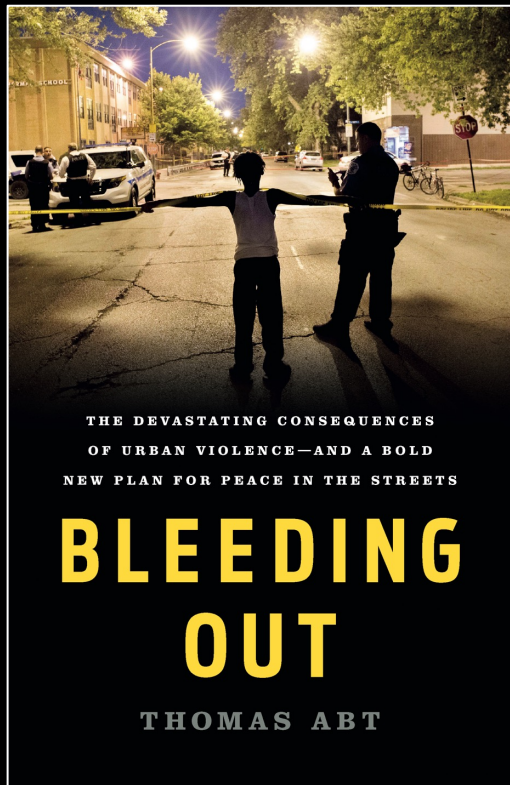


General Principles for Curbing Violent Crime

Thomas Abt, Founding Director, Center for the Study and Practice of Violence Reduction



Community gun violence has surged

- Gun violence now the leading cause of death in U.S. for youth (Goldstick et al., 2022)
- Recent spikes in homicide driven by community gun violence (Schleimer et al., 2021), meaning violence perpetrated with firearms in community settings
- Since 9/11, hundreds died in domestic terrorist attacks and mass shootings, but more than 100,000 perished due to community gun violence (Abt, 2019)

Community gun violence is costly and damaging

- Every homicide costs \$10-19 million in criminal justice, medical, other costs (McCollister et al., 2010; Cohen et al., 2004; DeLisi et al., 2010)
- The impact of community gun violence has always been deeply unequal and is increasing (Ludwig, 2023); Black Americans represent 14% of U.S. population but 53% of homicide victims (VPC, 2023)
- Most profound impact is on poor children: “[C]onverging evidence [shows] exposure to violence may be a central mechanism by which growing up in areas of concentrated disadvantage affects the life chances of children” (Sharkey, 2016)

This.

Racism

Segregation

Concentrated
poverty

Crime and
violence

Also
this.

Racism

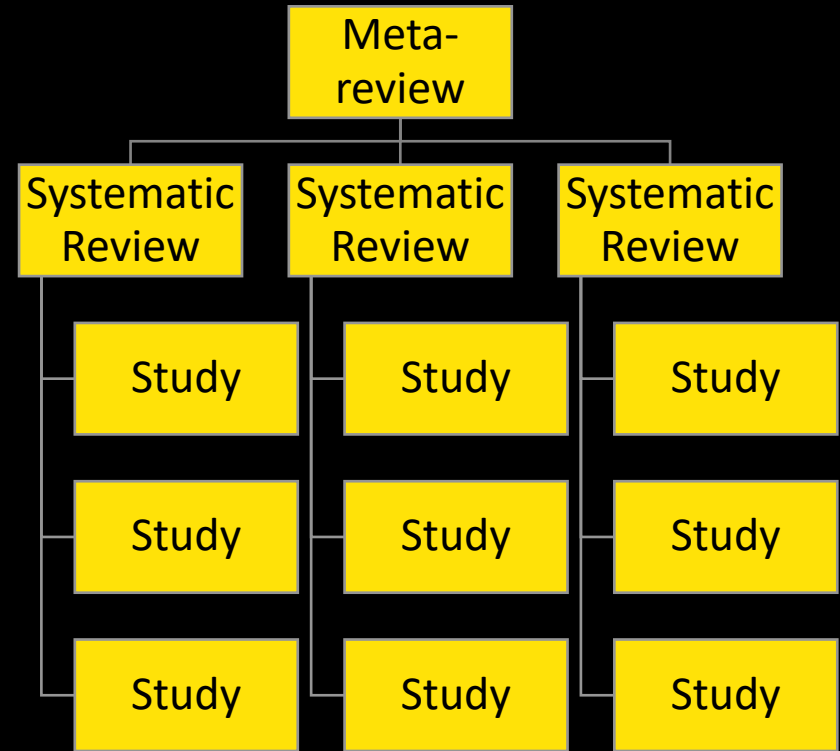
Segregation

Concentrated
poverty

Crime and
violence

What does the science say?

- Bleeding Out published in 2019
- Based on systematic meta-review (Abt & Winship, 2016) that synthesized results of 1,400+ individual impact evaluations
- Also conducted 50+ semi-structured interviews of victims, offenders, law enforcement, service providers, community leaders



Community gun violence is concentrated

- In U.S. cities, half of murders involve less than .06% of the city's population (Lurie et al., 2018), 4% of geography accounts for half of all crime (Weisburd, 2015)
- Looking across hundreds of evaluations, those that focus on high-risk people and places outperform those that don't (Abt & Winship, 2016)
- True for policing (Braga, 2015), gang prevention (Gravel et al., 2012; Petrosino et al., 2015), reentry (Hollin, 1999; Lipsey & Cullen, 2007); also true for public health (Limbos et al. 2007)
- Displacement a concern, but “over 30 years of research evidence... suggests that crime relocates in only a minority of instances” (Johnson et al., 2014)

Community gun violence responds to rewards and punishments

- Across hundreds of evaluations, evidentiary support for both “soft” and “tough” approaches (Abt & Winship, 2016)
- Prevention diverts future offenders, enforcement deters or incapacitates current offenders
- No city has successfully used only one or the other – must combine sustainability of prevention with immediacy of enforcement

Community gun violence thrives on injustice

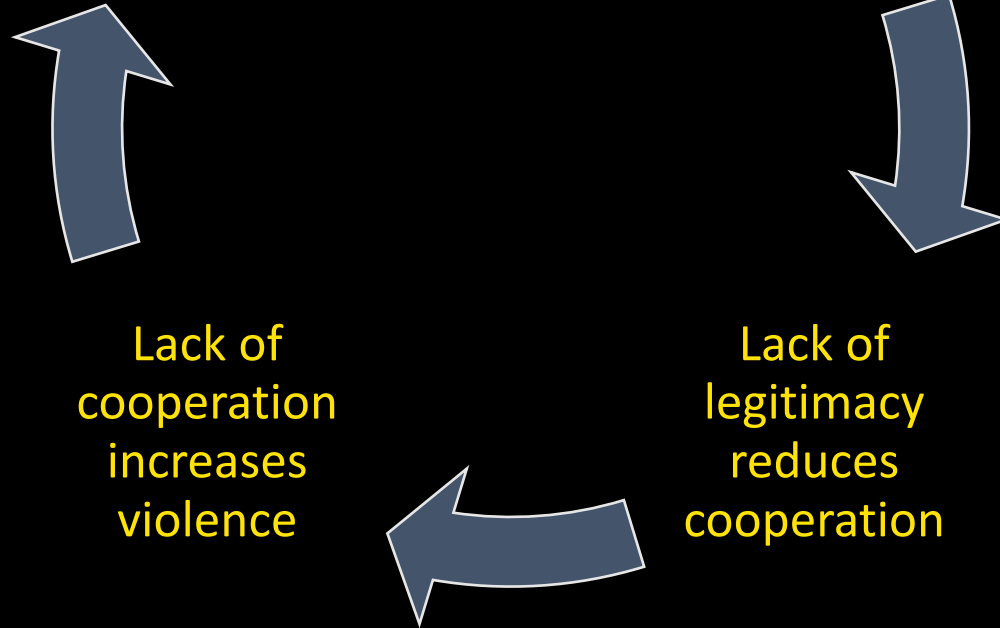
- Community gun violence closely connected to legitimacy: less fairness leads to more violence, e.g. Ferguson, Minneapolis (Abt, 2019)
 - Procedural justice: lack of trust and confidence results in less compliance, more violence (Papachristos, Meares, & Fagan, 2012)
 - Legal cynicism: when communities do not believe in criminal justice system, they withdraw from it (Kirk & Papachristos, 2011)
- Reforms that enhance legitimacy complement violence reduction strategies and can be done simultaneously

Increasing
violence
creates pretext
for poor
treatment

Poor treatment
erodes
legitimacy

Lack of
legitimacy
reduces
cooperation

Lack of
cooperation
increases
violence

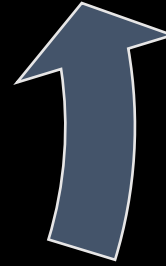


Increased
legitimacy
improves
cooperation

Improved
treatment
builds
legitimacy

Increased
cooperation
reduces
violence

Reduced
violence
incentivizes
improved
treatment



Focus. Balance. Fairness.

- Because community gun violence is concentrated, focused strategies are most effective
- Because community gun violence responds to both rewards and punishments, balanced approaches are required
- Because community gun violence thrives in the presence of injustice, fairness is essential

People-based approaches

- Use focused, balanced, and fair strategies to take the following 5 steps with high-risk individuals:
 1. Identify those most at risk, then engage
 2. Once engaged, stabilize by providing safety and security
 3. Once stabilized, treat unhealthy thinking, unsafe behavior, unaddressed trauma
 4. Once treated, offer educational and employment opportunities
 5. Punish those who persist with swift and certain sanctions

Place-based approaches

- Use focused, balanced, and fair strategies to take following 3 steps in high-risk micro-locations:
 1. Institute problem-oriented policing in hot spots
 2. Follow up policing with place-making
 3. Supplement policing and place-making with community-building

Behavior-based approaches

- In the U.S., broad-based efforts to address guns, gangs, and drugs in general have not been successful in reducing community violence (Abt, 2019)
- To enhance effectiveness, reframe as behaviors that facilitate violence, i.e. gun-carrying, gang-banging, violent drug dealing, then focus on these behaviors among hot people in hot spots

Putting the principles into action

- To succeed, cities must adopt the principles of focus, balance, and fairness – one or two not sufficient
- Must also implement and coordinate multiple people-, place-, and behavior-based strategies simultaneously

Question: can cities actually do this?

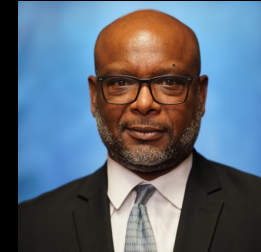
Answer: yes, with the right information, support, and leadership



TEN ESSENTIAL ACTIONS CITIES CAN TAKE TO REDUCE VIOLENCE NOW

ABOUT THE VCWG

- Launched in July 2021
- Diverse range of leaders dedicated to producing timely, relevant, reliable guidance
- Since July met 11 times, produced 3 reports on crime trends, held 3 live public web events, and issued 7 bulletins highlighting key findings



ABOUT THE 10 ESSENTIAL ACTIONS

- Identifies *10 Essential Actions* for cities to reduce community gun violence now
- List is not comprehensive; highlights actions that are most likely to make the greatest immediate impact
- Actions are short-term measures that can be started within a year
- Actions not a substitute for longer-term strategies and investments to address poverty, inequality, racism, and other underlying systemic causes of violence

THE 10 ESSENTIAL ACTIONS

1. Set a clear goal: commit to saving lives by stopping violence
2. Identify the key people and places driving the violence
3. Create a citywide plan for engaging key people and places
4. Engage people with empathy and accountability
5. Address locations using place-based policing and investment
6. Place responsibility for violence reduction at the top
7. Emphasize healing with trauma-informed approaches
8. Invest in anti-violence workforce development
9. Set aside funding for new stakeholders and strategies
10. Commit to continuous improvement



Our mission is simple:
to save lives by
stopping violence,
using science.

The Center for the Study and Practice of Violence Reduction – the VRC

- The VRC offers solutions to community gun violence by combining rigorous research with practical know-how
 - The VRC reviews research, summarizes it, and then makes it available in accessible, easy-to-use formats
 - Also provides practical instruction to cities on how to choose the right combination of anti-violence strategies for their jurisdiction
- Everything we do, we do for free

Practicum on Partnership-Based Violence Reduction

- On-site, in-person, 4-5 day workshop for participating cities
- Participants are high-level representatives of government, civic and community groups, non-governmental service providers, others
- Participants trained in selection, implementation, and coordination of evidence-informed strategies, then produce “plan to plan”
- After practicum, VRC supports remotely to help produce final plan and jump start implementation
- Currently working in Knoxville and Boston; homicides have dropped in both cities by **37%** and **6%** respectively; next city is St. Louis





For more information

Terp Magazine cover story: <https://terp.umd.edu/an-end-to-the-bleeding>

AP article: <https://apnews.com/article/gun-violence-research-knoxville-thomas-abt-faece441678e77776fe04db3243f6104>

VRC website: <https://vrc.umd.edu/>

Bleeding Out: <https://www.amazon.com/Bleeding-Out-Devastating-Consequences-Violence/dp/1541645723>

TED talk:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/thomas abt why violence clusters in cities and how to reduce it?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/thomas_abt_why_violence_clusters_in_cities_and_how_to_reduce_it?language=en)