

# WHITE RESIDENTS OF URBAN SANCTUARY COUNTIES ARE SAFER FROM DEADLY VIOLENCE THAN WHITE RESIDENTS IN NON-SANCTUARY COUNTIES



Mike Males, Ph.D., Senior Research Fellow  
Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice

December 2017

Research Report

## Introduction

The recent acquittal of an undocumented immigrant in the murder of a San Francisco woman has reignited an emotional debate over “sanctuary” policies (Delk, 2017). The White House and U.S. Department of Justice allege that sanctuary areas – cities, counties, and states that limit cooperation with federal immigration enforcement authorities – “breed crime,” especially murders and illicit-drug trafficking by undocumented immigrants that have cost “countless innocent American lives” (Lee, 2017; USDOJ, 2017; White House, 2017). The perception that sanctuary policies “put the public’s safety at risk” prompted the U.S. House of Representatives, on June 29, 2017, to approve the “No Sanctuary for Criminals Act,” a bill that would bar cities and states that decline to provide voluntary assistance to ICE from participating in certain federal grant programs (Delk, 2017; H.R. 3003, 2017). Federal judges have invalidated measures, but sanctuary legislation is still under consideration (U.S. District Court, 2017).

Yet, a recent national survey found that half of Americans support sanctuary policies and believe that they are necessary to ensure that undocumented individuals receive needed local services. Importantly, this poll also found that white respondents were the least likely to believe that “sanctuary cities should exist,” (45 percent), compared to 59 percent of African American respondents and 68 percent of Latino respondents (McClatchy-Marist Poll, 2017).

If these fears of sanctuary areas are warranted, we would expect to see elevated levels of homicide, firearm death, and illicit drug overdoses in areas that do not cooperate with federal immigration authorities. However, a comparison of the nation’s 12 large central metropolitan counties<sup>1</sup> with confirmed sanctuary policies<sup>2</sup> to 21 with some sanctuary policies<sup>3</sup> and 35 with no known sanctuary policies shows largely the opposite. White residents, in particular, are safer from these dangers in sanctuary areas than in non-sanctuary ones. The impact of sanctuary policies on people of color is less consistent, but overall, African American, Latino, Asian, and Native American residents generally experience greater safety in counties with at least some sanctuary policies.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identifies 68 U.S. counties and metropolitan areas as “large central metro” areas containing all or part of a city with a defined metropolitan area population of at least one million (CDC, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, counties are defined as “sanctuary” if they did not provide voluntary assistance with deportations by participating in the Priority Enforcement Program (PEP), an Obama-era immigration enforcement initiative administered by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) from 2014 through 2016. Specifically, counties are considered “sanctuary” if they declined: 1) to notify ICE 48 hours prior to the release of an individual thought to be an immigrant subject to deportation (notifications), and 2) to detain individuals for an additional 48 hours beyond their scheduled release to allow for apprehension by ICE agents (detainers) (Graber, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Counties defined as “partial sanctuary” are those that placed restriction on either notifications or detainers, but not both.

## Method

Data on county sanctuary status for 2015 were obtained courtesy of the Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC), which received this information from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) through a 2016 Freedom of Information Act request. The ICE data classifies U.S. counties according to their cooperation with federal immigration enforcement efforts. These data were combined with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) mortality information for the most current year available, 2015.

The data indicate that 12 large urban counties can be classified as “sanctuary” because they declined detainers and notifications under ICE’s Priority Enforcement Program (PEP),<sup>4</sup> (see Appendix). These urban counties have an aggregate population of 22 million (41 percent of whom are white) and include the cities of New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Washington D.C., and Philadelphia. Another 21 urban counties with a population of 38 million (42 percent of whom are white) are categorized as partial sanctuary because they declined to participate in some aspects of PEP (e.g. they have enacted policies declining detainers, but not notifications). The other 35 large counties have an aggregate population of 40 million (nearly 50 percent of whom are white) and did not establish policies limiting implementation of PEP or their sanctuary policies were unknown to ICE.

The CDC reports deaths from all violent causes, including homicides, firearms deaths, and deaths from overdoses of illicit drugs by county, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, along with corresponding populations (CDC, 2017). This analysis tabulates and compares deaths and death rates for all 68 large urban counties for 2015, the most recent year available at this publication.

## Results

As shown in Figure 1, white residents are substantially safer from deadly violence in urban sanctuary counties than in partial or non-sanctuary areas, a reality that contradicts public opinion toward sanctuary policies among white individuals. Furthermore, increasing protections for immigrants coincides with progressively declining levels of violent death, homicide, gun death, and drug death among white residents.

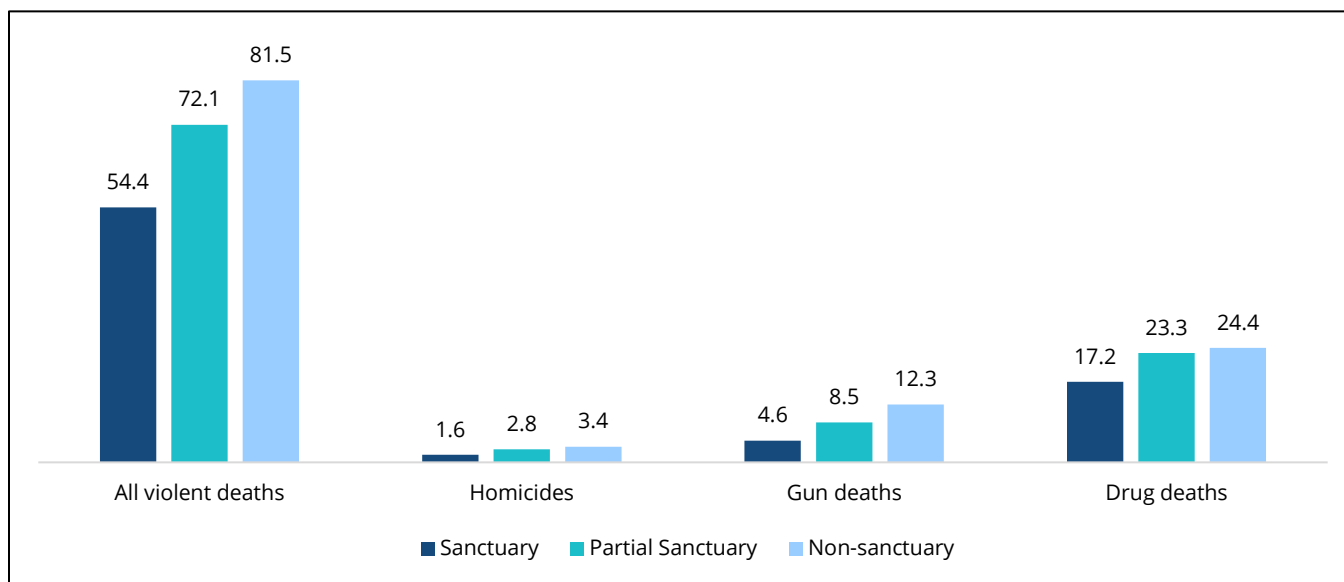
White residents of urban sanctuary counties are 26 percent less likely to die from overdoses of illicit drugs, 33 percent less likely to die from all violent causes,<sup>5</sup> 53 percent less likely to be a victim of homicide, and 62 percent less likely to die from gun violence than white residents of urban non-sanctuary counties (Figure 1). Residents of color generally have lower violent death rates in urban sanctuary counties than in non-sanctuary counties, with the exception of illicit drug overdose. These results merit further analysis of the impact of sanctuary policies on individual racial and ethnic groups. Urban sanctuary counties are also more racially and ethnically diverse than urban non-sanctuary counties (Table 1).

---

<sup>4</sup> In January 2017, the Trump administration terminated the Priority Enforcement Program (PEP) and restored the Secure Communities program.

<sup>5</sup> The CDC includes all homicides, gun deaths, fatal accidents, suicides, and other violent deaths for which intent is not determined in the category “violent death” (CDC, 2017).

**Figure 1. Deaths per 100,000 white (non-Latino) population in urban counties, by sanctuary status, 2015**



Source: CDC (2017); ILRC (2016).

**Table 1. Deaths per 100,000 population in urban counties, by race and sanctuary status, 2015**

	Deaths, white residents				Deaths, residents of color			
Rate	All violent	Homicide	Gun	Illicit drug	All violent	Homicide	Gun	Illicit drug
Sanctuary counties	54.4	1.6	4.6	17.2	44.2	11.5	10.4	11.6
Partial sanctuary counties	72.1	2.8	8.5	23.3	41.9	10.0	10.1	8.2
Non-sanctuary counties	81.5	3.4	12.3	24.4	52.8	15.1	15.2	10.0
Count	All violent	Homicide	Gun	Illicit drug	All violent	Homicide	Gun	Illicit drug
Sanctuary counties	4,813	141	411	1,523	5,688	1,481	1,344	1,495
Partial sanctuary counties	11,442	440	1,356	3,703	9,081	2,171	2,183	1,778
Non-sanctuary counties	16,069	663	2,434	4,813	10,579	3,031	3,045	1,994
Population	White residents	Residents of color	Percent white		Number of counties			
Sanctuary counties	8,847,653	12,870,917	40.7%		12			
Partial sanctuary counties	15,878,832	21,668,711	42.3%		21			
Non-sanctuary counties	19,712,895	20,018,441	49.6%		35			

Source: CDC (2017); ILRC (2016).

## Conclusion

Urban sanctuary and partial sanctuary counties have more racially diverse populations and are generally safer from violent death, whether self-inflicted or by others, than urban counties without established sanctuary policies. White residents are especially safe from violent death in the country's 12 urban sanctuary counties, with rates of homicide 31 percent lower, and gun death 59 percent lower, than in the country as a whole. Conversely, white residents are most in danger, especially from homicide and guns, in non-sanctuary urban counties (Males, 2017; 2017a). Partial

sanctuary urban counties report violent death statistics for white residents that lie between those of sanctuary and non-sanctuary counties.

This analysis confirms and extends previous research demonstrating that sanctuary areas are associated with better outcomes and enhanced safety (see, for example, Wong, 2017; Ousey & Kubrin, 2017; Lyons et al, 2013; Gonzalez, 2017). Attorney General Jeff Sessions' claim that a recent study showed sanctuary cities suffer higher violent crime rates has been rated as "mostly false" by Politifact and disputed by study authors themselves (Valverde, 2017). The study actually found "no statistically discernible difference in violent crime rate, rape, or property crime" attributable to sanctuary policies, "despite narratives to the contrary" (Gonzalez et al., 2017). Whether sanctuary status directly contributes to community safety, it is clear is that reduced cooperation with ICE and greater racial diversity are not associated with more deadly consequences, particularly for urban, white residents.

## References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2017). Compressed mortality file, underlying cause of death. At: <https://wonder.cdc.gov/mortSQL.html>.
- Delk, J. (2017). Sessions blasts sanctuary cities after Kate Steinle murder trial ruling. *The Hill*, November 30, 2017. At: <http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/362707-sessions-blasts-sanctuary-cities-after-kate-steinle-decision>.
- Gonzalez, B., Collingwood, L., & El-Khatib, S.O. (2017). The Politics of Refuge: Sanctuary Cities, Crime, and Undocumented Immigration. *Urban Affairs Review*. At: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1078087417704974>.
- Graber, L. & Marquez, N. (2016). Searching for Sanctuary: An Analysis of America's Counties & Their Voluntary Assistance with Deportations. Immigrant Legal Resource Center. At: [https://www.ilrc.org/sites/default/files/resources/sanctuary\\_report\\_final\\_1-min.pdf](https://www.ilrc.org/sites/default/files/resources/sanctuary_report_final_1-min.pdf).
- H.R. 3003. (2017). No Sanctuary for Criminals Act. 115<sup>th</sup> Congress. At: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/3003/text>.
- Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC). (2016). Priority Enforcement Program participation status. January 1, 2014 – September 30, 2015. Tabulation provided to ILRC by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement through a Freedom of Information Act request. Data on file with the author.
- Lee, M.Y.H. (2017). Trump's claim that sanctuary cities 'breed crime'. *Washington Post*, February 8, 2017. At: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2017/02/08/trumps-claim-that-sanctuary-cities-breed-crime/?utm\\_term=.83d6d3b1b070](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2017/02/08/trumps-claim-that-sanctuary-cities-breed-crime/?utm_term=.83d6d3b1b070).
- Lyons, C.J., Vélez, M.B., & Santoro W.A. (2013). Neighborhood immigration, violence, and city-level immigrant political opportunities. *American Sociological Review*, 78:4, June 2013. At: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0003122413491964>.
- Males, M. (2017). White people should be more afraid of other whites than they are of people of color. *Los Angeles Times*, 3 August 2017. At: <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-males-white-americans-violence-sanctuary-cities-20170803-story.html>.
- Males, M. (2017a). There's a myth that white people are safer among other whites. *Yes!* 21 August 2017. At: <http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/the-myth-of-white-safety-in-white-numbers-20170821>.

- McClatchy-Marist Poll. (2017). Most Americans Support Pathway to Citizenship, Issue of Sanctuary Cities More Divided. At: [http://maristpoll.marist.edu/wp-content/misc/usapolls/us170215/Complete%20Survey%20Findings\\_McClatchy-Marist%20Poll\\_Immigration.pdf](http://maristpoll.marist.edu/wp-content/misc/usapolls/us170215/Complete%20Survey%20Findings_McClatchy-Marist%20Poll_Immigration.pdf).
- Ousey, G. C. & Kubrin, C.E. (2017). Immigration and Crime: Assessing a Contentious Issue. *Annual Review of Criminology*, 1:1.1–1.22. At: <http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev-criminol-032317-092026>.
- U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ). (2017). Department of Justice Sends Letter to Nine Jurisdictions Requiring Proof of Compliance with 8 U.S.C. § 1373. April 21, 2017. At: <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/departments-justice-sends-letter-nine-jurisdictions-requiring-proof-compliance-8-usc-1373>.
- U.S. District Court, Northern District of California. (2017). Sanctuary jurisdiction cases. At: <http://www.cand.uscourts.gov/who/sanctuary-litigation>
- Valverde, M. (2017). Jeff Sessions cites study on sanctuary cities, researchers say he misrepresented it. *Politifact*, July 24th, 2017. At: <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2017/jul/24/jeff-sessions/jeff-sessions-mischaracterizes-study-sanctuary-cit/>.
- White House. (2017). President Donald J. Trump taking action against illegal immigration. June 28, 2017. At: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/06/28/president-donald-j-trump-taking-action-against-illegal-immigration>.
- Wire, S.D. (2017). Immigration bills approved by House would increase penalties under 'Kate's Law' and punish sanctuary cities. *San Diego Union Tribune*, June 30, 2017. At: <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/us-politics/la-pol-ca-immigration-kates-sanctuary-20170629-story.html>.
- Wong, T.K. (2017). The Effects of Sanctuary Policies on Crime and the Economy. *Center for American Progress*, January 26, 2017. At: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2017/01/26/297366/the-effects-of-sanctuary-policies-on-crime-and-the-economy/>.

**Please note:** Jurisdictions submit their data to the official statewide or national databases maintained by appointed governmental bodies. While every effort is made to review data for accuracy and to correct information upon revision, CJCJ cannot be responsible for data reporting errors made at the county, state, or national level.

**Contact:** For more information about this topic or to schedule an interview, please contact CJCJ Communications at (415) 400-5214 or [cjcjmedia@cjcj.org](mailto:cjcjmedia@cjcj.org)

## Appendix

**Table 1. Deaths per 100,000 population in urban counties, by race and sanctuary status, 2015**

County/Metro Area	Deaths, white residents					Deaths, residents of color				
	Violent	Homicide	Gun	Drug	Suicide	Violent	Homicide	Gun	Drug	Suicide
<b>Sanctuary</b>										
Bronx County, NY	75.0	0.7	2.0	30.1	13.4	38.1	7.5	5.1	13.7	6.8
Cook County, IL	50.0	1.1	4.5	14.1	14.1	54.1	19.7	18.7	12.6	5.8
District of Columbia, DC	31.9	2.8	2.8	7.3	6.9	90.9	31.5	26.6	25.2	8.2
King County, WA	59.3	1.5	7.4	16.1	16.5	36.8	5.6	6.4	8.8	7.6
Kings County, NY	35.4	1.0	1.2	11.7	8.0	34.4	8.6	7.2	8.1	5.5

	Deaths, white residents					Deaths, residents of color				
County/Metro Area	Violent	Homicide	Gun	Drug	Suicide	Violent	Homicide	Gun	Drug	Suicide
Multnomah County, OR	71.8	2.4	9.4	18.2	21.9	48.9	8.8	10.7	8.8	11.6
New York County, NY	29.7	0.5	0.6	9.3	11.5	34.2	4.4	2.7	10.9	7.8
Philadelphia County, PA	104.8	3.5	7.6	52.6	16.6	82.2	27.3	26.3	27.0	7.5
Queens County, NY	50.9	1.3	2.1	14.7	11.5	23.5	3.3	2.8	4.2	4.8
Richmond County, NY	50.7	1.0	2.0	22.2	8.4	39.6	7.3	5.7	10.7	7.9
San Francisco County, CA	69.3	3.8	4.6	25.3	15.2	58.4	6.8	6.2	20.7	10.3
Santa Clara County, CA	58.8	2.3	7.3	12.9	16.2	28.1	3.3	3.3	4.4	5.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>54.4</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>17.2</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>44.2</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>6.4</b>
<b>Partial Sanctuary</b>										
Alameda County, CA	54.5	2.5	5.9	18.7	16.0	39.7	9.4	9.1	8.8	5.8
Allegheny County, PA	90.1	2.3	8.7	36.2	17.6	96.7	37.7	36.5	25.4	8.6
Arlington County, VA	34.2	0.0	4.1	8.9	8.9	20.5	2.4	2.4	6.0	4.8
Baltimore City, MD	112	5.6	6.7	61.6	53.7	149.6	66.3	60.5	48.3	44.9
Clark County, NV	94.1	5.7	19.5	33.8	29.3	47.7	9.0	10.4	9.6	8.5
Denver County, CO	79.1	3.5	9.6	19.8	17.9	65.2	11.0	11.7	13.9	10.7
Erie County, NY	75.7	2.1	3.4	33.1	13.3	63.3	17.8	14.5	19.7	7.0
Franklin County, OH	79.7	3.4	10.5	30.3	18.2	63.8	20.4	22.1	14.2	8.5
Hennepin County, MN	69.2	1.4	4.5	12.9	16.0	51.7	12.5	11.4	12.2	8.2
Hillsborough County, FL	88.7	3.6	15.3	19	22.2	49.1	8.5	9.9	6.6	6.8
Los Angeles County, CA	53.2	2.7	7.5	14.3	16.0	31.2	7.7	7.2	4.5	5.6
Miami-Dade County, FL	69.1	3.3	9.6	18.7	18.7	49.3	9.9	12.2	5.6	9.2
Monroe County, NY	61.1	0.7	4.3	14.2	13.3	53.1	19.1	14.8	12.4	8.6
Orange County, CA	57.6	1.4	6.2	21.4	16.3	24.9	2.9	3	5.0	5.2
Orleans Parish, LA	103.6	6.5	17.8	43.7	27.5	116.9	57.1	55.2	18	7.9
Providence County, RI	97.9	2.2	5.4	41	17.2	48.3	6.2	5.3	21.7	6.6
Ramsey County, MN	82.8	1.4	6.3	16	16.6	57.6	11.6	9.5	13.7	11.6
Riverside County, CA	79.4	2.9	10.6	24.6	21.5	36.5	5.4	5.7	8.0	5.5
Sacramento County, CA	85.0	4.6	11.4	28.9	23.8	44.6	9.6	10.4	9.6	7.2
San Diego County, CA	68.7	2.9	8.3	19	20.2	30.5	3.4	4.0	6.8	6.2
Suffolk County, MA	69.7	1.6	1.4	36.4	8.5	39.3	9.2	8.7	13.6	5.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>72.1</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>23.3</b>	<b>18.6</b>	<b>41.9</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>7.4</b>
<b>Non-sanctuary or Unknown Sanctuary Status</b>										
Alexandria City, VA	40.3	0.0	3.7	12.2	12.2	29.3	5.6	2.8	4.2	5.6
Bexar County, TX	81.7	3.6	14.6	11.4	20.2	49.1	7.6	9.0	9.9	9.2
Collin County, TX	49.3	1.3	9.9	11.2	16.6	20.3	4.2	5.8	2.8	4.4
Cuyahoga County, OH	84.8	2.6	8.4	29.4	17.6	73.3	26.9	25.5	14.9	6.5
Dallas County, TX	75.8	4.9	14.2	18.3	22.4	42.3	9.7	9.9	8.1	5.8
Davidson County, TN	98.4	3.1	12.0	33.4	20.1	62.1	21.3	22.0	8.4	8.4
Duval County, FL	100.0	4.9	19.3	29.1	26.8	58.0	22.0	22.7	5.2	6.9
Essex County, NJ	49.3	2.7	3.5	10.9	10.5	61.1	22.4	19.3	15.9	3.9
Fulton County, GA	58.9	1.4	5.8	20.5	11.4	65.0	19.3	19.6	10.2	7.9

County/Metro Area	Deaths, white residents					Deaths, residents of color				
	Violent	Homicide	Gun	Drug	Suicide	Violent	Homicide	Gun	Drug	Suicide
Hamilton County, OH	97.7	2.9	9.4	54.7	16.4	74.2	26.9	25.3	23.1	6.8
Harris County, TX	77.7	4.5	17.4	18.3	21.2	44.0	12.3	12.8	6.2	6.2
Hartford County, CT	82.0	1.4	4.0	28.3	15.6	45.9	11.9	10.1	14.7	4.6
Hudson County, NJ	58.8	1.5	2.5	25.9	12.0	27.8	6.3	4.2	7.0	5.1
Jackson County, MO	88.0	5.2	13.9	21.9	21.9	91.9	40.1	39.7	13.2	10.4
Jefferson County, AL	105.6	5.3	18.1	38.8	24.6	81.7	35.0	35.9	10.2	5.3
Jefferson County, KY	101.6	6.0	16.5	34.2	27.1	72.0	26.6	27.1	13.1	5.2
Kent County, MI	71.0	1.2	6.6	17.9	12.5	51.0	5.8	7.7	11.0	7.7
Maricopa County, AZ	84.5	3.7	15.5	21.4	24.7	49.7	8.4	9.4	10.9	9.4
Marion County, IN	95.2	5.8	15.7	37.1	22.7	73.0	30.4	32.2	12.8	6.6
Mecklenburg County, NC	57.2	2.2	8.8	16.1	15.5	42.6	10.7	13.1	5.3	6.7
Milwaukee County, WI	103.4	2.2	5.7	33.0	15.8	83.1	31.6	28.7	19.7	4.7
Norfolk City, VA	75.5	3.6	9.9	29.7	20.7	55.5	24.4	23.7	7.4	5.9
Oklahoma County, OK	109.1	7.1	19.3	22.5	26.6	70.8	20.6	18.7	13.0	8.9
Orange County, FL	74.0	2.7	8.2	24.9	16.3	43.6	11.4	11.5	7.7	6.0
Pinellas County, FL	110.7	1.7	15.7	23.7	25.5	52.9	10.1	9.6	8.3	7.0
Richmond City, VA	58.5	1.1	4.4	18.8	8.8	78.6	28.5	27.8	23.9	6.9
Salt Lake County, UT	86.3	2.5	16.4	30.0	35.5	41.1	4.8	5.4	13.3	11.2
Shelby County, TN	101.6	6.3	16.8	33.1	21.4	72.8	24.7	25.4	13.3	6.3
St. Louis City, MO	80.0	5.0	12.0	39.7	18.4	145.5	73.3	71.6	28.7	9.2
Tarrant County, TX	66.2	4.3	13.8	14.0	22.0	29.7	6.4	6.5	3.9	4.9
Travis County, TX	80.4	3.2	12.4	17.7	22.4	35.8	3.1	3.1	5.5	5.7
Union County, NJ	61.5	0.4	2.1	20.1	13.7	29.9	6.8	5.6	6.2	3.1
Virginia Beach City, VA	59.1	1.4	8.6	17.3	15.9	30.6	6.1	6.1	6.7	5.5
Wake County, NC	50.7	1.1	6.7	11.4	14.1	29.8	5.6	4.1	4.1	2.8
Wayne County, MI	86.5	3.0	9.3	43.2	16.8	97.6	33.4	32.5	22.1	9.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>81.5</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>12.3</b>	<b>24.4</b>	<b>20.6</b>	<b>52.8</b>	<b>15.1</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>6.7</b>