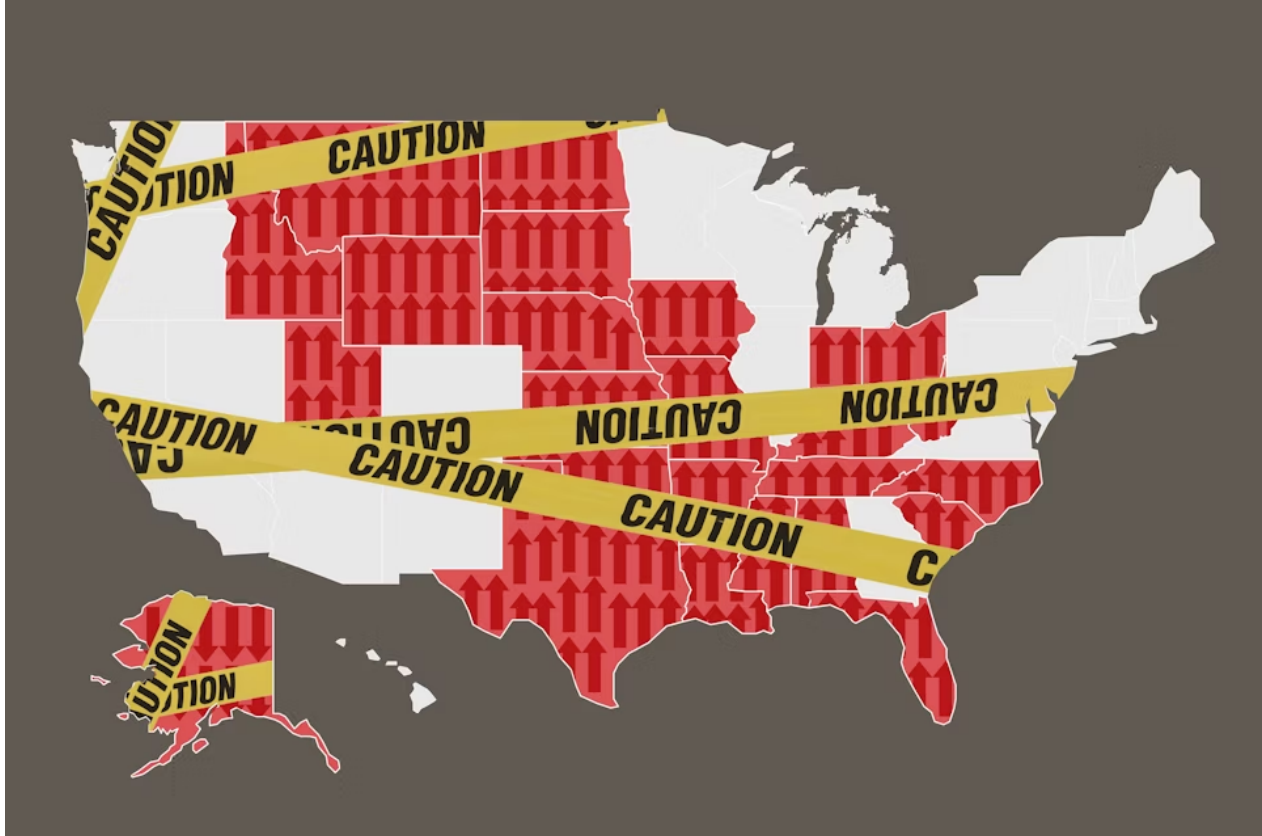


The 21st Century Red State Murder Crisis



Kylie Murdock
Policy Advisor
[@kyliemurdock](https://twitter.com/kyliemurdock)



Jim Kessler
Executive Vice President for Policy
[@ThirdWayKessler](https://twitter.com/ThirdWayKessler)

Takeaways

- The red state murder rate was 33% higher than the blue states murder rate in both 2021 and 2022.
- 2022 was the 23rd consecutive year that murder plagued Trump-voting states at far higher levels than Biden-voting states.

- 8 out of the 10 states with the highest murder rates in 2022 voted for Donald Trump in both 2016 and 2020.
- From 2000 to 2022, the average red state murder rate was 24% higher than the average blue state murder rate.
- Red states like Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama are America's murder capitals and have had the highest three murder rates for 15 of the last 23 years.
- The excuse that sky high red state murder rates are because of their blue cities is without merit. Even after removing the county with the largest city from red states, and not from blue states, red state murder rates were still 20% higher in 2021 and 16% higher in 2022.

House Republicans held three field hearings on violent crime last year in New York City, Chicago, and Washington DC. These hearings should have been held in the murder-plagued states of Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama. In 2023, Speaker Johnson's hometown of Shreveport, Louisiana had a murder rate 8 times higher (41.1) than Minority Leader Jeffries' hometown of Brooklyn, New York (5.0), 6 times higher than Nancy Pelosi's San Francisco, California (6.6), and more than 7 times higher than the national average (5.5). Our 2023 report in the Red State Murder Problem series found that murder rates were significantly higher in red states than blue states every year from 2000 to 2020. Over these 21 years, the red state murder rate was 23% higher than the blue state murder rate. Our analysis of the latest CDC data found that 2021 and 2022 were no exception.

This report analyzes homicide data from 2021 and 2022 for all 50 states from the Center of Disease Control Wonder's National Center for Health Statistics Mortality Data. Data is based on death certificates collected by state registries and provided to the National Vital Statistics System. Like in our previous report,

we chose CDC data over FBI data because it's more up to date and does not rely on voluntary reporting from counties and states. All states are required to report mortality data to the CDC while they're only encouraged to report crime data to the FBI. To allow for comparison across states, we calculated the state's per capita murder rate, the number of murders per 100,000 residents, and categorized states by their presidential vote in the 2020 election, resulting in an even 25-25 state split.

There are several reasons for high crime rates—poverty, lax gun laws, a lack of social services—but voting for Democrats is not one of them.

We found that murder rates were down 5% nationwide in 2022, but a red state murder gap still persists. Murder rates in red states were 33% higher than in blue states in both 2021 and 2022. As in 2019 and 2020, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama hold the first, second, and third highest murder rates in the country, respectively. The rest of the 10 states with the highest murder rates include the usual suspects—South Carolina, Missouri, Tennessee, New Mexico, and Georgia. States with the highest murder rates continue to be dominated by red states, not perennial blue states like New York and California. Even when we removed the county with the largest city in red states (and kept them in for blue states), murder rates in red states were still 20% higher in 2021 and 16% higher in 2022. This is not a blue cities in red states problem.

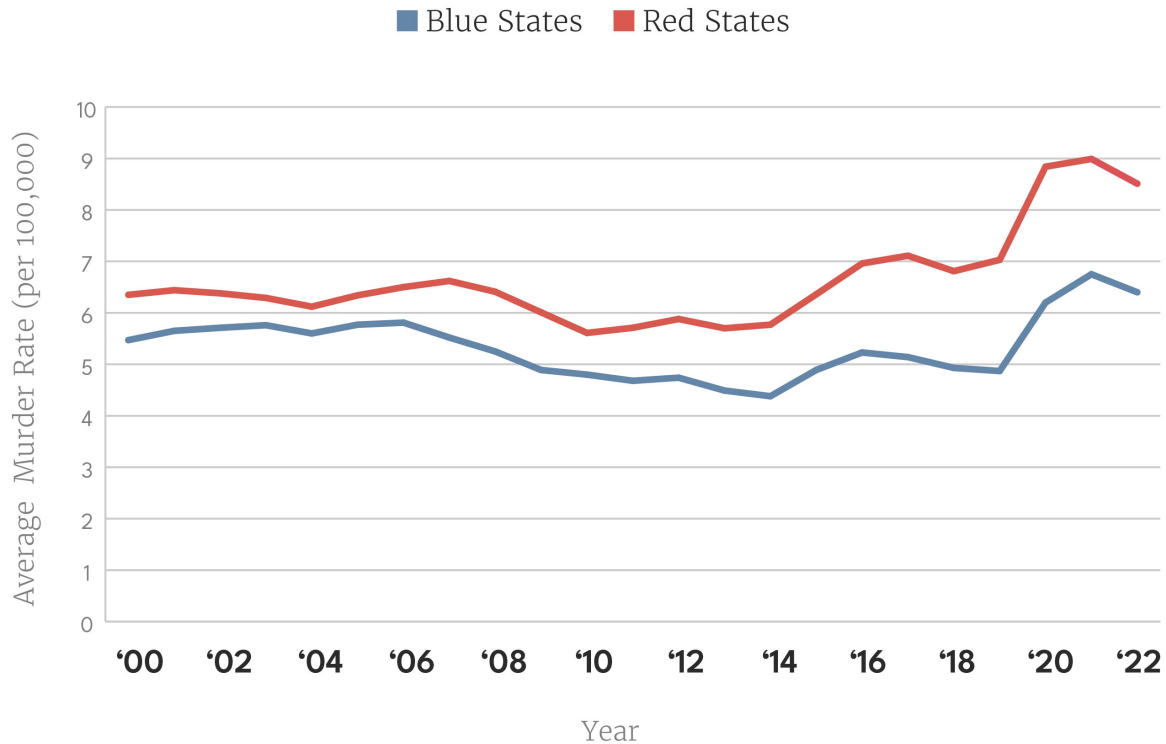
Our analysis confirms that murder rates have been higher in red states than blue states every year this century. Yet, the prevalent media and political narrative is that crime is rampant in Democrat-run states and cities when the reality is that people are far safer in New York City than in over a dozen red states.

The murder crisis continues to be far higher in red states in 2021 and 2022.

Murder rates in red states were 33% higher than in blue states in both 2021 and 2022. In 2021, the average red state murder rate was 9.0 per 100,000 residents while the average blue state murder rate was 6.8 per 100,000. In 2022, both these numbers dropped slightly to 8.5 per 100,000 residents and 6.4 per 100,000 residents, respectively. If blue states had a murder rate as high as red states, they would have seen 4,255 additional murders in 2021 and 3,971 additional murders in 2022.

While murder rates thankfully dropped in both red and blue states in 2022, red states still see a murder rate significantly higher than blue states have *ever* seen. Over the past 23 years, the murder rate in blue states hit its peak in 2021 at 6.8, significantly lower than red states' peak at 9.0 the same year. Red states haven't seen a murder rate under 6.8 since 2015, when the murder rate was 6.4. Red states clearly have a murder problem that defies the easy media narrative prevalent today.

The Murder Rate in Red States Has Exceeded the Murder Rate in Blue States Every Year This Century



Source: Author's calculations based on CDC data.

Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama continue to dominate the top three spots.

Since 2016, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama have had the three highest murder rates in the country. This trend actually goes back to 2008, with just one year, 2015, where Maryland replaced Alabama in the top three. These three red states have consistently had the highest murder rates for over 15 years now. You would never know it based on the media.

For example, Republicans and the media constantly talk about rampant crime in California and New York, but those two states' murder rates don't even crack the top 25. In 2021, California had the 26th highest murder rate and New York had

the 33rd highest rate. In 2022, California had the 30th and New York had the 35th highest murder rates. Mississippi and Louisiana's murder rates have been more than three times California's over the past two years. And more than four times New York's. If California had the same murder rate as Mississippi, 5,101 more people would have been killed in 2022. If New York had the same murder rate as Louisiana, 2,814 more people would have died.

Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama have consistently had the highest murder rates for over 15 years now. You would never know it based on the media.

The rest of the top 10 states with the highest murder rates in 2021 and 2022 include usual suspects like New Mexico, Missouri, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia. In 2021, 6 out of the 10 states with the highest murder rates voted for Donald Trump in 2020. In 2022, 8 out of 10 voted for Donald Trump. Red states like Tennessee and South Carolina have consistently been in the top 10 since 2000, with Arkansas joining the mix in 2004 and Missouri in 2008. Blue states like New Mexico and Georgia have consistently been in the top 10 since 2000. Maryland and Illinois were in the top 10 in 2021 but dropped off in 2022 when their murder rates decreased by 16% and 15%, respectively. They were replaced in the top 10 by Arkansas and Alaska. Alaska saw an unexpected 51% increase in homicides from 2021 to 2022, bringing them from the 24th highest murder rate to the 10th highest.

The bottom line is that red states have dominated, and continue to dominate, the top 10 states with the highest murder rates since 2000.

Top 10 Murder Rates in the United States

State	2021 Homicide Rate	State	2022 Homicide Rate
MS	22.2	MS	18.68
LA	20.3	LA	18.32
AL	14.8	AL	13.93
NM	14.4	NM	13.66
SC	12.5	MO	12.03
IL	11.7	GA	11.32
MO	11.5	SC	11.14
TN	11.5	TN	10.90
MD	11.4	AR	10.64
GA	11.1	AK	10.10

Source: Author's calculations based on CDC data.



Even when large cities are removed from red states, murder rates are still higher.

Red states have a ready excuse for their high murder rates: the blue cities located within them. This is laughable. First of all, blue states have more blue cities than red states. That's what makes them blue. Second, the numbers don't lie even when giving red states some extra help.

We removed all of the murders in the county with the largest city for 22 of 25 red states. Three red states—North Dakota, Wyoming, and Idaho—didn't have large enough cities to perform this exercise, so we used their original rate. We did not give this advantage to blue states. Even with this special help, the red state murder problem still persisted. (Information on which counties were removed is in the methods section below.)

In 2021, after removing the largest cities, red states still had a murder rate 20% higher than blue states. Even after removing Jackson and New Orleans, Mississippi and Louisiana still had the two highest murder rates in the country. Alabama still held the number three spot, and South Carolina the number five spot. Removing big blue cities from red states didn't make much of a difference in state rankings.

In 2022, red states still had a murder rate 16% higher than blue states after removing their largest cities. Alabama actually jumped from the number three spot to the number one spot. Mississippi held the second spot, New Mexico (a blue state that did not get added help) the third, and Louisiana the fourth. So, while there was some small movement of states in this exercise, the theme stayed the same: red states continued to dominate the states with the highest murder rates, even after we gave them the advantage of removing their largest city.

But we shouldn't have to remove these cities from our analysis because blue cities in red states are still beholden to red state laws. Laws that make it easy for criminals to traffic and buy guns (86% of homicides are committed with a gun). Laws that underinvest in cities, law enforcement, and social programs. Laws that are responsible for the highest poverty rates and the highest gun violence rates in the country. The fact that murder rates are high all across red states, not just in cities, tells us that state laws play a part in their crime problem.

Blue states spend 33% more money per capita on policing than red states.

For years, Republicans have struck political gold by accusing Democrats of “defunding the police.” And for many voters, those accusations have stuck. In 2022, 48% of voters believed that the Democratic party supports defunding the police. But the data tells a different story.

Using the 2021 Annual Survey of State and Local Government Finances from the US Census Bureau, we analyzed police spending in all 50 states. We found that blue states spent 33% more money per capita on policing than red states. In 2021, blue states on average spent \$453.67 per resident on policing while red states only spent \$341.37 per resident.

Many of the states accused of “defunding the police,” like California, New York, and Illinois, actually spent the most on policing. California spent the most on policing at \$634.53 per resident. New York spent the third most at \$539.92. And Illinois came in sixth place at \$471.26. Eight out of 10 states spending the most on policing are blue states, joined by red states Alaska and Florida. And those blue states aren’t just blue, they’re the bluest of states—California, New York, Maryland, Illinois, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Minnesota.

Blue States Spend More on Policing

State	Highest Per Capita Spending	State	Lowest Per Capita Spending
CA	\$634.53	ID	\$281.20
AK	\$553.46	SD	\$273.80
NY	\$539.92	SC	\$271.98
MD	\$510.72	MS	\$268.26
FL	\$486.10	UT	\$266.81
IL	\$471.26	WV	\$263.04
NV	\$465.96	ME	\$257.33
NJ	\$454.98	IN	\$251.02
RI	\$451.53	AR	\$241.49
MN	\$450.42	KY	\$232.18

Source: Author's calculations based on CDC data.



In 2021, states on average spent \$406.68 per resident on policing. Out of the 25 red states, 23 spent less than the national average. About half of blue states spent more or the same and half spent less than the national average. High crime states like Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama aren't investing in policing at the same level as blue states. Mississippi came in the 44th spot out of 50, spending 34% less than the national average. Louisiana did a bit better, coming in 27th place spending 15% less than the national average. Alabama took the 39th spot, spending 29% less than the average. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell's home state of Kentucky came in dead last, spending 43% less than the national average. For perspective, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's home state of New York came in third place, spending 33% more on policing than the average

state and 173% more than Minority Leader Mitch McConnell's home state. And it's not because there's more crime in New York—quite the opposite. Kentucky's 2021 homicide rate was double New York's, 9.0 compared to 4.5. It's ironic that Republicans accuse Democrats of defunding the police when their states are the ones spending the least on policing.

Conclusion

Violent crime and homicide rates both fell in 2022. Preliminary data for 2023 shows that hopeful trend accelerating. But if you listened to Republicans, you would think crime is skyrocketing, specifically in blue states and cities. While murder rates have fallen, they're still significantly higher in red states than blue states. There are several reasons for high crime rates—poverty, lax gun laws, a lack of social services—but voting for Democrats is not one of them.