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How Dangerous Is Jacksonville?

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HOW DANGEROUS IS JACKSONVILLE? By Michael Lewyn

Even the briefest look at Jacksonville's newspapers and blogs might suggest to the casual reader that Jacksonville is an insanely crime-infested place. A google search for "+ Jacksonville + crime" yielded over 2 million "hits" - almost as many as for "+ atlanta + crime".

These concerns certainly have some basis in reality: Jacksonville did suffer from more murders in 2007 than it did earlier in the decade. Even so, Jacksonville is safer than many other large cities. Jacksonville, a city with about 800,000 inhabitants, suffered from 123 murders. Thus, 15 out of every 100,000 Jacksonville residents were murdered (since 123 divided by 8 is just over 15). On the negative side, this is significantly higher than the national murder rate of about 5.5 per 100,000 people. However, some other large and mid-sized cities are in much worse shape. Table 1 below compares Jacksonville to some of America's murder champions (as well as to some other Florida cities).

TABLE 1: Murder rates per 100,000 residents: Jacksonville vs. [Some Of] The Really Vile

Baltimore	45
Detroit	44
St. Louis	39
Birmingham	37
Newark	37
Baton Rouge	31
Washington, DC	29
Philadelphia	27
Atlanta,	26
Richmond	26
Kansas City, MO	25
Rochester, NY	24
Miami	19
Orlando	17
Jacksonville	15
Tampa	8

As Table 1 above shows, lots of cities have higher murder rates than Jacksonville. Of course, the table above only reflects murders- but a similar table could be created for any other crime, because Jacksonville's deviation from the national average is greater for murder than for other crimes. Jacksonville's murder rate of 15 per 100,000 is roughly 2.6 times the 2005 national murder rate, while its violent crime rate of 1021 per 100,000 is "only" 2.2 times the national violent crime rate (467 per 100,000).

When compared to the average big city, Jacksonville looks a bit better: Jacksonville's murder rate is only slightly higher than the national average for cities with 500,000 to 1

million people (15 as opposed to the national average of 13.7). Similarly, our overall violent crime rate is only slightly higher than the national average for such cities (1021 as opposed to the national average of 989).

Before we break out the champagne and celebrate our newly-discovered safety, I add a note of caution: Jacksonville's relative safety is in part due to a statistical fluke. Many decades ago, Jacksonville and Duval County were consolidated; thus, Jacksonville effectively annexed hundreds of square miles of suburbia. Since some of these suburbs were low-crime areas, this annexation may have reduced Jacksonville's crime rate. [It logically follows that if](#) Jacksonville was limited to its pre-1967 urban core, the city of Jacksonville's crime rate might well be much higher. By contrast, many other cities were unable to annex suburbs in the 20th century, and thus are left with nothing but their pre-1950 core. For example, St. Louis, Missouri includes only 61 square miles because its suburbs are separate municipalities in St. Louis County. Obviously, Jacksonville's 757 square miles are not comparable to St. Louis's 61 square miles.

How can Jacksonville's crime be fairly compared to that of other cities? I decided to group other cities together with their inner suburbs, to create an amount of geographic space roughly comparable to Duval County. In other words, I don't think it's fair to compare 757-square mile Jacksonville with 131-square mile Atlanta. Instead, I compared Jacksonville to Atlanta's two most urban counties (Fulton and DeKalb) which together gobble up about 797 square miles, about the same amount as Jacksonville. When this comparison is made, Atlanta looks a bit safer: in 2007, Fulton and DeKalb Counties have 18 murders per 100,000 residents, only slightly [more](#) than Jacksonville.

Table 2 below compares [Jacksonville to the Fulton/DeKalb combination](#), and also to some other groupings of city and inner suburb that have about the same geographic extent as Jacksonville (500 to 1200 square miles).

TABLE 2 Murder rates per 100,000 residents: The city of Jacksonville (compared with other counties or groups of counties that are 500-1200 square miles and combine city and suburb)

Detroit (Wayne County)	23
Baltimore (Baltimore city plus Baltimore county)	22
Atlanta (DeKalb and Fulton Counties)	18
Philadelphia (Philadelphia, Delaware and Montgomery Counties)	16
Jacksonville	15
Kansas City, MO (Jackson County)	13
Nashville (Davidson County)	13
St. Louis (St. Louis city plus St. Louis county)	12
Dallas (Dallas County)	10
Orlando (Orange County)	9
Chicago (Cook County)	9
Tulsa (Tulsa County)	9
Charlotte (Mecklenburg County)	9

Oklahoma City (Oklahoma County) 8
Columbus, Ohio (Franklin County) 8
Rochester, NY (Monroe County) 7

Buffalo (Erie County- Buffalo) 6
Tampa (Hillsborough County) 5
Minneapolis (Hennepin County) 5
Portland, OR (Multnomah and Washington Counties) 3

As Table 2 shows, when [comparable city/suburb groups are listed](#), Jacksonville seems [more dangerous than the average city- but at the same time](#), hardly the most dangerous place in America. Several regions have higher murder rates than Jacksonville, and even some of the regions with lower murder rates are only slightly safer than Jacksonville.

Once suburbia is included in the crime mix, the gap between the best and worst cities narrows quite a bit.

Of course, this table overlooks one key fact: not every neighborhood in Jacksonville (or any other city) is equally dangerous. Perhaps a better analysis would compare similar neighborhoods in different cities: for example, is an upper-class intown neighborhood like Riverside safer or more dangerous than, say, Miami's Coconut Grove, or Atlanta's Virginia-Highlands? Unfortunately, statistics for individual neighborhoods are rarely available from police.

Most incorporated suburbs, however, publish crime statistics. And I can make a wild guess about crime rates in some Jacksonville neighborhoods, since the city's website (<http://www.coj.net/Departments/Sheriffs+Office/About+the+JSO/Uniform+Crime+Statistics++Mapped+Statistics.htm>) allows you to search for crimes within half a mile of a given address. I combined searches for my past two residences on the northern edge of Mandarin to come up with 3 robberies in one square mile. Since my zip code contains about 3000 people per square mile, I suspect that the robbery rate for my neighborhood is about 3 per 3000, or about 100 per 100,000. (Note that I picked robberies instead of murders because most small suburbs have murders less often than once a year). [So the robbery rate in Mandarin is probably somewhere around 100 per 100,000, at least in its more middle-class neighborhoods.](#)

Table 3 compares my wild guess about my neighborhood's crime to inner-ring suburbs ([that is, suburbs relatively close to downtown, as opposed to exurbs 20 miles away](#)) in some other cities that I am familiar with.

TABLE 3 Robberies per 100,000: Mandarin (?) Vs. Other cities' inner suburbs

Beverly Hills (Los Angeles) 231

Oak Park (Detroit) 225

Southfield (Detroit) 214

Decatur (Atlanta) 192
Alexandria (Washington, DC) 117

Bellaire (Houston) 107
Mandarin around 100

Brookline (Boston) 84
Coral Gables (Miami) 80

St. Louis Park (Minneapolis) 71

Dormont (Pittsburgh) 57

Skokie (Chicago) 55
Cleveland Heights (Cleveland) 35

Brighton (Rochester) 31
Narberth (Philadelphia) 24
Clayton (St. Louis) 24

So where does that leave us? Jacksonville, alas, is more typical than we would like to think: not the best, but far from the worst.