High homicide rate plagues Baton Rouge

Experts point to Hurricane Katrina as tipping point in recent increase

BY KIMBERLY VETTER

Baton Rouge's homicide rate exceeds the rates in New York, Los Angeles and Washington D.C. — a reality experts partially blame on a population that became more violent after Hurricane Katrina.

Experts say poverty, lack of education and the breakdown of the family have contributed to the city's increased violence but point to Hurricane Katrina as the tipping point at which Baton Rouge joined a handful of other cities struggling with exceedingly high homicide rates.

"For a long time, Baton Rouge was able to resist the New Orleans crime influence, but that changed after Katrina," said Edward Thibodeaux, LSU sociology professor and criminologist. "Ever since the storm, Baton Rouge has been flirting with being one of the most violent cities in the nation, especially when it comes to homicide.

The majority of homicide victims and perpetrators in Baton Rouge are young black men, but experts say the population at large is no longer immune to such violence and it has become increasingly fearful of crime.

Several area residents say they are tired of the bloodshed and are afraid of becoming victims of violent crime, something they rarely thought of in the past.

Dallas Ballmer, president of the Federation of Greater Baton Rouge Civic Associations, said crime in Baton Rouge is terrible and getting worse.

"It's not designated to one place anymore," he said. "It's moving into areas all over town."

Using the recently revised U.S. Census population estimates of 298,493, Baton Rouge had a per capita homicide rate of 28 per 100,000 people in 2011 — a four percent jump from a decade ago when the rate was 26 per 100,000.

A shifting population precipitated by hurricanes Katrina and Rita made crime rates difficult to determine during the past few years. Based on available data, the homicide rate in Baton Rouge has fluctuated between 20 and 34 per 100,000 during the past 10 years, reaching a high of 34 in 2000 and a low of 20 in 2001.

New population estimates released by the federal government in 2010 made the calculation of crime rates more accurate, providing a clearer picture of what's going on in the community.

That picture in Baton Rouge is grim, especially compared with the nation as a whole and to other cities of similar size and demographic makeup. Baton Rouge's homicide rate last year surpassed the rates in many American cities — including Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Cleveland and Boston — and was the second-highest in Louisiana, next to New Orleans.

"Crime is a major issue in Baton Rouge," said East Baton Rouge Parish District Attorney Hillar Moore III. "It's one of the main things people talk about."

East Baton Rouge Parish Mayor-President Kip Holden said "crime is an issue that seriously concerns us all and fighting it involves us all.

"Getting drugs and guns out of our community is going to take effective law enforcement," the mayor said. "It's also going to take strong families, dedicated clergy, good jobs and a functional public education system that educates our children."

Holden said his administration...

Homicide is a leading cause of premature death in the U.S. — especially for black boys and men. Baton Rouge ranks as one of the nation's more violent cities. This is the second in The Advocate's series examining violence in our community, its underlying causes and ways to address it.
HOMICIDE

Contrary to Popular Opinion...

You will see a number of someones saying that the number of violent crimes in the black community had fallen. On the contrary, it is the black community that has seen the greatest percentage of violent crimes. This is not just from the FBI, but also from the local police departments. In 2020, the number of violent crimes in the black community increased by 22%.

There are several factors contributing to this increase. First, the sense of security has decreased, leading to more incidents of crime. Second, the lack of police presence in some areas has led to a rise in crime. Third, the economic downturn has led to more joblessness and poverty, which are correlated with higher crime rates.

In conclusion, the increase in violent crimes in the black community is a serious concern that needs to be addressed. It is important for communities to come together and find solutions to this problem.