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# ShotSpotter isn't magic, but in Detroit, it's working | Opinion

Detroit Police Chief Todd Bettison says the city's historic crime drop shows targeted technology, community violence prevention and focused policing are saving lives.

Todd Bettison Op-ed contributor

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## Detroit leaders tout historic reduction in homicide rates

Homicides fell by about 19% in 2025, a decline from 2024, according to Detroit Police Chief Todd Bettison.

I am extremely proud to serve as Chief of Police in the great City of Detroit at a time when our city is experiencing a historic decline in violent crime.

At the end of 2025, Detroit recorded reductions across every major category of crime. Criminal homicides fell another 19% from the previous year, and non-fatal shootings declined by 26%, cutting our 2023 totals nearly in half. We also saw big reductions in carjackings, auto thefts, robberies, sexual assaults, and other major offenses.

Our gains have outpaced the rest of the nation. If we look back to the year 2019 — before the nationwide temporary spike in violent crime during COVID — by 2024 (the last year for which we have

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national rates of homicide stayed constant, while in other midwestern cities, rates of homicide either fell only modestly or actually rose.

There is more work to be done; but at the same time, we can take note of these truly historic gains and acknowledge that they did not happen by chance. Rather they are the result of years of intentional work, strong partnerships, and a comprehensive public safety strategy that combines community engagement, violence intervention, focused policing, and strategic investments in technology.

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## Violence prevention and police technology both helped Detroit

A cornerstone of Detroit's approach has been our commitment to community-based violence prevention. Community violence intervention organizations work directly with individuals and neighborhoods most impacted by gun violence, helping mediate conflicts, connect residents to services, and interrupt cycles of retaliation before shots are fired. Their work is often unseen, but it has been an essential contributor to Detroit's progress.

Technology has also played a vital role.



One tool in our broader public safety strategy is ShotSpotter, the gunshot detection technology that Detroit first piloted in 2014 and was fully rolled out in targeted areas in 2023. At the Detroit Police Department, we pride ourselves in being driven by evidence about what helps us serve the public better, and to us the evidence is clear that ShotSpotter is a major tool in doing just that.

I want to be clear that the difference maker is not simply the technology itself — it is how we implement that technology. Here in Detroit, what has led to success is how we use this tool, in conjunction with the other tools in our toolbox.

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ShotSpotter technology consists of acoustic sensors that detect brief moments of firearm discharge, not nearby conversations, protecting the privacy of Detroiters as much as possible. These sensors tell us exactly when and where a shooting occurs in real time. To make the best use possible of this technology, the Detroit Police Department strategically deploys the system in areas experiencing elevated levels of gun violence and trains our officers on the appropriate use of it.

This specialized approach has improved our ability to rapidly identify and respond to gunfire incidents, often before a 911 call is ever made, if one is at all. When we respond quickly, we are more likely to catch the perpetrator. We are more likely to collect shell casings that can be used to investigate and eventually close cases, and we are able to get to victims more quickly in some cases and get them the medical attention they need. All this can mean the difference between life and death.

As a law enforcement officer for more than 30 years, I can tell you the results are striking. Between 2022 and 2025, nearly every ShotSpotter deployment area experienced a reduction in fatal and non-fatal shootings, ranging from 20 percent to an astounding 75%. On Detroit's eastside, fatal and non-fatal shootings declined by 56% during that period. We continue to refine our response using the technology: Between 2024 and 2025,

8 minutes and 8 seconds to 6 minutes and 49 seconds. We also can see that ShotSpotter aids our officers to respond to gunfire incidents that otherwise may have gone unreported. The share of gunshot detection alerts occurring without a corresponding 911 call in 2025 was 24.5%.

## **ShotSpotter is working**

One recent research working paper calls into question the efficacy of ShotSpotter in Detroit. Because we are driven by data, we have read the research and reflected on it. The time frame that study examined was before the full roll-out of the technology.

We seek to continuously improve our use of the tool, refine our approach, and believe that it is being used much more effectively in our most recent years. We will continue to evaluate the program, but in the meantime, we believe the evidence is strong that it has contributed to our city's historic success.

ShotSpotter is not a silver bullet. It is not the only driver of our recent success. No single program, technology, or enforcement strategy can take credit Detroit's historic reductions in crime. Public safety is achieved through many interconnected efforts working together: community violence intervention, neighborhood partnerships, focused policing, officer recruitment and retention, youth engagement, and smart investments in technology. Every part of this strategy matters, and it is difficult to zero in on how much of the reductions in violent crime can be attributed to any one piece. But when we are seeing the success that we are in Detroit, why mess with it?

To me the evidence is clear: ShotSpotter is an important piece of that puzzle.

As cities across the country evaluate their public safety strategies, Detroit's experience demonstrates that technology can be effective when it is deployed thoughtfully, targeted strategically, and integrated into a broader community-centered approach to violence reduction.

The historic drop in crime we are seeing today belongs to the people of Detroit. It is the result of residents, community organizations, city leaders, and police officers working together toward a safer city. Detroit's progress is real and we are committed to building on it, continuing to use all the tools that have made this historic success possible.

*Todd Bettison is Detroit's chief of police. Submit a letter to the editor at [freep.com/letters](https://www.freep.com/letters), and we may publish it in print or online.*