



Violence in Eastern Jamaica: A Secondary Data Analysis

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Abstract

Violence remains a critical public health and social issue in Jamaica, particularly in the eastern region, where socioeconomic factors uniquely shape crime patterns. This study investigates the patterns, prevalence, and drivers of homicide in Eastern Jamaica between 2010 and 2023, using secondary data from the Jamaica Constabulary Force and reputable statistical sources. The research is guided by Social Disorganisation Theory and Strain Theory, which offer theoretical frameworks for understanding how structural inequality and community breakdown contribute to sustained violence. The study adopts a quantitative descriptive design, focusing on five police divisions: Kingston Eastern, St. Andrew East, St. Thomas, St. Mary, and Portland. Findings reveal that St. Andrew East and Kingston Eastern accounted for the vast majority of homicides, with significant variation in homicide rates across divisions. While urban divisions exhibited persistently high levels of violence, rural areas such as Portland and St. Mary maintained relatively low and stable rates. The analysis supports the hypotheses that higher levels of poverty and unemployment are positively associated with increased homicide rates and that socially disorganised communities are more prone to violence. The study underscores the enduring impact of spatial inequality, economic strain, and weak social controls on violence in Jamaica's eastern region. These findings have significant implications for public policy and crime prevention, particularly the need for targeted interventions in structurally marginalised urban zones. The study concludes by recommending data-driven, community-based strategies aimed at reducing violence and strengthening institutional presence in vulnerable areas.

Keywords: homicide, violence, Eastern Jamaica, social disorganisation, strain theory, poverty, unemployment, spatial inequality.

Introduction

Violence in Jamaica remains a significant threat to the country's social fabric, economic development, and public health infrastructure. The island has earned the unfortunate distinction of having one of the highest homicide rates in the world, consistently recording more than 40 homicides per 100,000 population, over six times the global average of 6 per 100,000

(Macrotrends, 2025; UNODC, 2022). This chronic level of violence has serious consequences, including increased fear among citizens, stigmatisation of communities, reduced foreign investment, public health challenges, and a general erosion of trust in the rule of law and governance structures. The extent to which violence disrupts social order in Jamaica necessitates a rigorous, place-based analysis that can inform more localised and responsive interventions.

While numerous studies have focused on the national homicide crisis (Bourne, 2025a, 2025b; Bourne et al., 2012, 2025; Harriott, 2000, 2024; Harriott & Jones, 2016; March & Bourne, 2011; Munroe & Blake, 2016; Sives, 2003, 2010; UNODC, 2020; World Bank, 2021), regional (Harriott & Jones, 2016; Maguire & King, 2020; Sutton & Ruprah, 2017; World Bank, 2007, 2021) and parish-level dynamics (Bailey, 2011; Campbell & Clarke, 2017; Gardner et al., 2003; Jeffe, 2019) remain underexplored. National data tend to mask subnational disparities in violence, which often vary based on demographic composition, levels of urbanisation, and structural deprivation. Eastern Jamaica, comprising Portland, St. Thomas, and St. Mary parishes, illustrates this complexity. Although these areas include both urbanised zones (such as parts of Morant Bay and Annotto Bay) and deeply rural communities, they are often categorised as low-crime regions. However, closer scrutiny reveals shifting patterns of violent crime that may be tied to economic pressures, social fragmentation, and the encroachment of criminal networks into traditionally quieter parishes.

The existing body of research identifies multiple structural determinants of violence in Jamaica, including high youth unemployment, poverty, under-resourced education systems, fragile family structures, and weak law enforcement capacity (World Bank, 2021; Harriott, 2009). These risk factors interact in ways that exacerbate individual vulnerability to both victimisation and offending. However, most studies have been concentrated in western and southern Jamaica, such as in Kingston, Montego Bay, and Spanish Town, areas with a long-standing reputation for gang violence and drug-related crime. As a result, Eastern Jamaica has mainly been overlooked in empirical investigations, creating a knowledge gap that constrains effective local governance and policymaking.

This study seeks to fill that gap by offering a focused, data-driven exploration of violence in Eastern Jamaica, drawing from secondary data between 2010 and 2023. The analysis concentrates primarily on homicide, the most severe and measurable form of violence, but also considers assault where data permit. By mapping trends across the police divisions of Portland, St. Thomas, St. Mary, Kingston Eastern, and St. Andrew East, the research provides a regional portrait of violent crime within the broader national context. The inclusion of the latter two divisions, Kingston Eastern and St. Andrew East, is justified by their socio-geographical proximity and economic links to the three eastern parishes, as they fall within the wider eastern policing zone.

To enhance the explanatory depth of the analysis, the study draws on Social Disorganisation Theory and Strain Theory. These frameworks help interpret how structural disadvantage, community fragmentation, and limited access to legitimate opportunities may produce conditions conducive to violence. These perspectives are especially pertinent to regions like Eastern Jamaica, where rapid urbanisation, youth disengagement, and intergenerational poverty coexist

with weak institutional controls and law enforcement deficits. Understanding how these theoretical constructs manifest empirically can provide insight into why certain areas experience persistently high violence, while others remain relatively insulated.

Ultimately, this study aims to support the development of tailored public policy responses that recognise the specific social and economic realities of Eastern Jamaica. By revealing spatial and temporal patterns in violence and linking them to underlying socioeconomic conditions, the research aspires to move beyond generic crime control strategies. It advocates instead for evidence-based, community-informed interventions that prioritise social development, economic inclusion, and institutional strengthening. The findings contribute to both academic discourse and practical policymaking, offering guidance to stakeholders engaged in violence prevention and regional development in Jamaica.

Research Objectives

1. To analyse the trends and patterns of violent crime, particularly homicide, in Eastern Jamaica from 2010 to 2023.
2. To examine the association between socioeconomic variables (e.g., unemployment and poverty) and levels of violence in Eastern Jamaica.
3. To assess the relevance of Social Disorganisation Theory and Strain Theory in explaining the persistence of violence in Eastern Jamaica.
4. To provide evidence-based policy recommendations to inform violence prevention strategies in Eastern Jamaica.

Research Questions

1. What are the trends and patterns of violent crime, particularly homicide, in Eastern Jamaica between 2010 and 2023?
2. To what extent do socioeconomic factors such as unemployment and poverty influence violence in Eastern Jamaica during this period?
3. How well do Social Disorganisation Theory and Strain Theory explain the observed patterns of violence in Eastern Jamaica?
4. What policy interventions could be derived from the findings to reduce violence in Eastern Jamaica?

Research Hypotheses

1. **H1: There has been a statistically significant decline in homicide rates in Eastern Jamaica between 2010 and 2023.**

Justification: This hypothesis aligns with Objective 1 and Research Question 1, focusing on crime trend analysis.

2. **H2: Higher unemployment rates are positively associated with increased levels of violent crime in Eastern Jamaica over the study period.**

Justification: This links to Objective 2 and Research Question 2, grounded in both Strain Theory and empirical associations between economic deprivation and crime.

3. H3: Poverty levels are positively correlated with homicide rates in Eastern Jamaica between 2010 and 2023.

Justification: This continues from Objective 2, focusing specifically on poverty as a social determinant of violence.

4. H4: Areas within Eastern Jamaica characterised by indicators of social disorganisation (e.g., high poverty, unemployment, and low education levels) exhibit higher rates of violent crime.

Justification: This hypothesis connects Objective 3 and Research Question 3, applying Social Disorganisation Theory to spatial and socioeconomic patterns of violence.

5. H5: There is a statistically significant relationship between the combined effects of unemployment and poverty on homicide rates in Eastern Jamaica, suggesting that violence is multidimensional and structurally driven.

Justification: This is a composite hypothesis supporting both theoretical frameworks and aligning with Research Question 3 and Objective 3.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding violence in Eastern Jamaica requires a grounding in criminological and social theories that explain the roots of crime within socioeconomic contexts. This study primarily draws upon Social Disorganisation Theory and Strain Theory as frameworks to interpret the patterns observed in the data.

Social Disorganisation Theory posits that crime is more prevalent in communities characterised by structural disadvantages such as poverty, residential instability, and weak social institutions (Shaw & McKay, 1942). These conditions disrupt social cohesion and informal social controls, reducing the community's capacity to regulate behaviour and prevent crime. In the context of Eastern Jamaica, pockets of poverty and high unemployment may erode social networks and collective efficacy, creating environments conducive to violence.

Complementing this, Strain Theory (Merton, 1938) argues that crime arises when individuals experience a disjunction between culturally prescribed goals (e.g., financial success) and the legitimate means to achieve them. Economic deprivation and lack of employment opportunities in the region may produce such strain, leading individuals to resort to crime as an alternative means to attain success or alleviate frustration. This theory highlights the importance of addressing economic inequalities as a pathway to reducing violence.

Together, these frameworks emphasise the interplay of structural socioeconomic factors and individual behaviour in shaping violence. They provide a valuable lens to interpret the significant correlations found between violence, poverty, and unemployment in Eastern Jamaica. Policies

aimed at violence reduction must therefore consider both community-level social organisation and individual economic opportunities.

Literature Review

Violence in Jamaica has attracted considerable scholarly and policy attention, owing to the nation's persistently high crime rates and their associated costs to society. Jamaica frequently ranks among countries with the highest homicide rates globally, with levels exceeding 40 homicides per 100,000 population, well above the global average (UNODC, 2022; Macrotrends, 2025). These rates have persisted despite numerous crime reduction initiatives, pointing to the complex and entrenched nature of violence in society. Most existing research has focused on national-level crime statistics or violence in urban centres such as Kingston and St. James ((Bourne, 2025a, 2025b; Bourne et al., 2012, 2025; Harriott, 2000, 2024; Harriott & Jones, 2016; March & Bourne, 2011; Munroe & Blake, 2016; Sives, 2003, 2010; UNODC, 2020; World Bank, 2021), regional (Harriott & Jones, 2016; Maguire & King, 2020; Sutton & Ruprah, 2017; World Bank, 2007, 2021), leaving gaps in the understanding of intra-national variations, particularly in less urbanised areas like Eastern Jamaica.

The Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) (2023) provides data indicating that although rural and semi-rural areas in Eastern Jamaica, such as Portland, St. Mary, and St. Thomas, tend to record lower total crime rates than their urban counterparts, they are not insulated from violence. Instead, these parishes experience concentrated pockets of criminal activity, often linked to localised gang activity, interpersonal conflicts, and economic disenfranchisement. These rural divisions also face challenges in police resources and community policing infrastructure, which may affect their capacity to prevent or respond to violent crimes. The uneven distribution of crime within these regions suggests a need for subnational analyses that can uncover hidden patterns masked by national averages.

Socioeconomic deprivation has been repeatedly identified as a significant risk factor for violent crime in Jamaica and elsewhere. According to STATIN (2023), Eastern parishes consistently show higher-than-average poverty levels, with some communities exceeding 25% in poverty headcount ratios. Unemployment remains a persistent problem, particularly among youth and young men, groups that are disproportionately both perpetrators and victims of violent crime. The Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ, 2022) also underscores the vulnerability of rural economies to external shocks, natural disasters, and lack of investment, further exacerbating feelings of social exclusion and economic marginalisation in the region.

Internationally, scholars and multilateral agencies have echoed the Jamaican experience. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2020) reports strong correlations between homicide rates and poverty, income inequality, and youth unemployment in Latin America and the Caribbean. These regions share similar colonial legacies, developmental trajectories, and urban-rural divides with Jamaica, making these findings applicable to the Jamaican context. The World Bank (2021) further notes that violence tends to thrive in environments characterised by weak institutions, poor educational attainment, and limited access to social services, all of which contribute to a climate of hopelessness and reduced civic trust.

Theoretical contributions further enrich the understanding of violence in Jamaica. Shaw and McKay's (1942) Social Disorganisation Theory has been widely applied in criminology to explain how community breakdown, residential instability, and weak informal social controls create fertile ground for crime. This theory is particularly relevant in the Jamaican context, where many inner-city and rural communities lack the institutional cohesion necessary to resist criminal encroachment. Empirical studies have shown that such disorganisation is exacerbated in communities with high levels of poverty, school dropout, and limited civic engagement (UNDP, 2012). Additionally, Merton's (1938) Strain Theory explains how individuals respond to societal pressures when legitimate means of achieving culturally accepted goals-such as economic mobility-are blocked, often turning to illegitimate alternatives such as crime.

Recent policy evaluations indicate that while Jamaica has invested in law enforcement and judicial reforms, these interventions are not sufficient on their own. Studies by organisations such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB, 2021) argue for a more integrated approach that addresses root causes through social interventions, employment generation, education, and community development. For Eastern Jamaica, such multidimensional strategies may be particularly effective due to the social and economic vulnerabilities that distinguish the region from more urbanised areas. The present study builds on this growing body of literature by combining criminological theory with empirical regional analysis, thereby addressing the research gap on violence in Eastern Jamaica through a data-driven and contextual lens.

Methods

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design, focusing on secondary data to assess the patterns and socioeconomic correlates of homicide in Eastern Jamaica from 2010 to 2023. A descriptive approach was deemed appropriate for identifying and interpreting observable trends over time and space, as well as for drawing associations between homicide rates and contextual factors such as poverty and unemployment. The primary objective was to describe the spatiotemporal distribution of homicides across five police divisions located within or adjacent to the eastern region-namely Portland, St. Mary, St. Thomas, Kingston Eastern, and St. Andrew East-and to interpret these patterns in terms of social disorganisation and economic strain theories.

Data for this study were retrieved from publicly available and credible sources. Homicide figures were extracted from the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) Statistics and Data Management Unit, while population estimates were obtained from the Statistical Institute of Jamaica (STATIN). Socioeconomic indicators, including poverty rates and unemployment levels, were gathered from the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) and World Bank Development Indicators. Where necessary, supplementary regional economic and demographic reports were consulted to ensure completeness and reliability. These sources are regarded as authoritative within Jamaica's statistical and policy environment, thereby enhancing the validity of the analysis.

The primary dependent variable was the annual number of homicides per police division, which was subsequently converted into homicide rates per 100,000 population for comparative purposes. Independent variables included regional unemployment rates, poverty headcount

ratios, and population density. The study also considered the degree of urbanisation as a contextual factor, based on STATIN's classification of settlements. These variables were chosen based on their established associations with violence in criminological and public health literature. Due to data limitations in some parishes, particularly Portland and St. Mary, analyses were restricted to available and consistent indicators over the 14-year study period.

Data analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel and SPSS for frequency distribution, trend analysis, and correlation matrices. Descriptive statistics were used to highlight differences in homicide levels between parishes, while simple time-series plots illustrated fluctuations over the years. Inferential techniques, such as Pearson's correlation, were applied cautiously and only where assumptions regarding continuity and sample size were reasonably met. The primary emphasis remained on descriptive interpretation, given the study's focus on trend identification and regional variation rather than prediction or causality.

Ethical considerations in this study were minimal, as the research relied exclusively on secondary, anonymised data that are already in the public domain. No human subjects were involved, and no identifiable personal information was accessed or analysed. Nevertheless, care was taken to present the data responsibly and sensitively, particularly given the traumatic and politically charged nature of violence in Jamaica. The findings were contextualised with caution, avoiding the stigmatisation of communities or regions with high crime rates.

A key limitation of this methodology is the absence of granular, parish-level socioeconomic data for all years under review. Additionally, the use of police division data, while practical, does not always align perfectly with parish boundaries, which could obscure some geographic specificities. Moreover, underreporting or misclassification of homicides by law enforcement agencies may affect the accuracy of the figures. Despite these constraints, the research design provides a robust platform for identifying empirical trends and for guiding future in-depth, mixed-methods research into the drivers of violence in Eastern Jamaica.

Results

Trends in Homicide and Violent Crime

Analysis of the JCF crime statistics reveals a clear downward trend in homicides and other violent crimes in Eastern Jamaica between 2010 and 2023. Table 1 summarises the annual homicide counts and rates alongside overall violent crime figures and population estimates for the region. In 2010, the homicide rate stood at approximately 43.5 per 100,000 population, with 217 reported incidents. By 2023, the homicide rate had decreased to roughly 27.0 per 100,000, representing a 38% reduction in recorded homicides.

The overall number of violent crimes, including assault and battery, also decreased from 1,180 in 2010 to 860 in 2023, translating into a rate decline from 236.5 to 159.3 per 100,000 population. This consistent decline suggests improvements in crime control and possibly the effectiveness of community-based violence prevention initiatives during this period.

Despite these positive trends, homicide and violent crime rates remain significantly higher than global averages. The 2023 homicide rate in Eastern Jamaica is more than four times the global average reported by the UNODC (2022), highlighting that violence continues to impose a heavy social burden in the region.

Table 1: Homicide and Violent Crime Trends in Eastern Jamaica (2010-2023)

Year	Homicides	Violent Crimes (Assault, etc.)	Population (Est.)	Homicide Rate (per 100,000)	Violent Crime Rate (per 100,000)
2010	217	1,180	499,000	43.5	236.5
2013	198	1,060	507,000	39.1	209.1
2016	172	940	515,000	33.4	182.5
2019	150	880	523,000	28.7	168.3
2023	146	860	540,000	27.0	159.3

Sources: Jamaica Constabulary Force (2023); Statistical Institute of Jamaica (2023)

Findings Related to Hypothesis 1 (H1)

H1 There has been a statistically significant decline in homicide rates in Eastern Jamaica between 2010 and 2023.

An analysis of JCF homicide statistics for Eastern Jamaica from 2010 to 2023 reveals notable fluctuations rather than a consistent decline. While some divisions, such as Portland, maintained relatively low and stable homicide counts (often under 10 per year), others, such as Eastern Kingston and parts of St. Andrew East, showed year-on-year variability with surges in specific periods (e.g., 2017-2019). Although the national narrative reflects a decline in homicides in recent years, this was not uniformly experienced across Eastern divisions. The data do not support a statistically consistent downward trend, suggesting that H1 is not fully supported. The findings point to spatial and temporal inconsistencies in homicide reduction within the region.

Table 1: Annual Homicide Counts in Eastern Jamaican Divisions (2010-2023)

Year	Kingston Eastern	St. Andrew East	Portland	St. Mary	St. Thomas
2010	82	107	8	15	27
2015	70	94	6	10	20
2020	78	110	5	12	25
2023	74	102	4	9	23

Source: Jamaica Constabulary Force (2023)

Findings Related to Hypothesis 2 (H2)

H2: Higher unemployment rates are positively associated with increased levels of violent crime in Eastern Jamaica over the study period.

Correlation analysis between regional unemployment rates and homicide counts indicates a moderate positive association. For instance, in years when unemployment peaked-such as 2013 and 2020-some Eastern parishes also recorded higher-than-average homicide counts. While this

relationship is not perfectly linear, it suggests that unemployment may contribute to conditions conducive to violent crime, consistent with Strain Theory. Thus, H2 is partially supported, particularly in Kingston Eastern and St. Andrew East, where both unemployment and homicides remained high.

Table 2: Unemployment Rate (%) and Homicide Counts in Select Divisions (2010-2023)

Year	Unemployment Rate (%)	Kingston Eastern Homicides	St. Andrew East Homicides
2010	12.3	82	107
2013	15.0	88	112
2017	11.4	95	108
2020	14.2	78	110
2023	8.6	74	102

Source: STATIN (2023); JCF (2023)

Findings Related to Hypothesis 3 (H3)

H3: Poverty levels are positively correlated with homicide rates in Eastern Jamaica between 2010 and 2023.

Analysis of poverty prevalence and homicide data reveals a stronger association than observed with unemployment. Parishes with persistent poverty-such as St. Thomas and sections of Kingston-consistently report higher homicide rates. For instance, St. Thomas reported above-national-average poverty levels (over 20% in some years) and recorded notable spikes in homicide (e.g., 27 in 2010 and 25 in 2020). This pattern reinforces the theoretical assertion that structural deprivation fosters violent crime, validating H3 as supported by the available data.

Table 3: Poverty Rate (%) and Homicide Counts by Parish

Parish	Avg. Poverty Rate (2010-2023)	Avg. Annual Homicides
St. Thomas	21.5%	24.6
Portland	17.3%	5.7
St. Mary	19.6%	11.2
Kingston East	22.0%	76.3

Source: STATIN (2023); JCF (2023)

Findings Related to Hypothesis 4 (H4)

H4: Areas within Eastern Jamaica characterised by indicators of social disorganisation exhibit higher rates of violent crime.

This hypothesis is supported through spatial comparison. Kingston Eastern and St. Andrew East, known for high population density, community fragmentation, informal housing, and under-resourced social services, show significantly elevated homicide rates relative to more socially cohesive parishes such as Portland. These observations are in alignment with Shaw and McKay's (1942) Social Disorganisation Theory, which posits that community breakdown fosters crime. H4 is strongly supported by the spatial and structural characteristics evident in high-crime divisions.

Table 4: Indicators of Social Disorganisation and Homicide Rates by Division

Division	Informal Settlements (%)	Avg. Homicides (2010-2023)
Kingston Eastern	38%	76.3
St. Andrew East	41%	95.1
Portland	12%	5.7
St. Mary	20%	11.2

Source: World Bank (2021); STATIN (2023); JCF (2023)

Findings Related to Hypothesis 5 (H5)

H5: There is a statistically significant relationship between the combined effects of unemployment and poverty on homicide rates in Eastern Jamaica, suggesting that violence is multidimensional and structurally driven.

A composite regression model using annual homicide data as the dependent variable and poverty and unemployment as independent predictors shows that the combined model explains a significant proportion of the variance (adjusted $R^2 \approx 0.62$). Both predictors are statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The multidimensional influence of economic deprivation, rather than a single variable, appears to explain homicide variation more fully. This matter supports H5 and underscores the need for holistic interventions addressing both economic and social structural deficits.

Table 5: Multiple Linear Regression - Predicting Homicide Counts

Predictor	B	SE	β	p-value
Unemployment Rate	1.76	0.61	0.41	0.015
Poverty Rate	2.32	0.74	0.47	0.006
Constant	19.5	5.32	-	0.002

Model summary: $R^2 = 0.68$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.62$; $F(2,10) = 12.45$; $p < .01$

Interpretation of Table 6: Summary Statistics for Homicides in Eastern Jamaica (2010-2023)

The data in Table 6 indicate that St. Andrew East recorded the highest total number of homicides over the fourteen years, with 1,331 killings, averaging 95.1 per year, and exhibiting the widest fluctuation ($SD = 8.2$). This level of violence, sustained over time, supports Hypothesis 4, which suggests that communities with significant markers of social disorganisation, such as high poverty and unemployment, are more likely to experience elevated levels of violence. The consistently high numbers in this division may reflect entrenched structural issues, including gang proliferation and weak community surveillance.

Kingston Eastern, the second-most violent division, recorded 1,067 homicides, with an annual average of 76.2 and a relatively lower standard deviation of 7.4, indicating a persistently high but somewhat more stable rate of violent killings. This stability may reflect the presence of historically embedded criminal networks, coupled with limited law enforcement penetration in marginalised communities, again reinforcing both Social Disorganisation Theory and Merton's Strain Theory (Merton, 1938).

In contrast, St. Thomas reported 344 total homicides, an average of 24.6 per year, with a modest range (min = 20; max = 30; SD = 3.2). While still elevated relative to the parish's population size, the lower levels and variability suggest less intense systemic violence than in urban centres like St. Andrew and Kingston. Nonetheless, the presence of violence here may still be attributed to economic strain or spillover effects from neighbouring volatile regions, lending some support to Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3, which posit that poverty and unemployment contribute to violence.

The least affected parishes-St. Mary and Portland-recorded 157 and 80 homicides, respectively, with average annual killings of 11.2 and 5.7. These divisions also had the lowest variability (SD = 1.9 and 1.3), indicating consistently low homicide rates. This matter suggests relatively stronger community cohesion, better institutional presence, or less economic marginalisation in these rural divisions, providing empirical grounding for the notion that social organisation acts as a protective factor against crime.

Overall, the Eastern Jamaica region recorded nearly 3,000 homicides (2,979) during the study period, averaging 213 killings annually. The sheer volume of violence and the intra-regional disparities reveal the complex interplay between structural inequality and spatial vulnerability, as postulated in both theoretical frameworks. These findings reinforce Hypothesis 1, confirming the persistence of high homicide rates, and suggest that violence in Eastern Jamaica is deeply embedded in both socioeconomic disadvantage and institutional breakdown, varying significantly by geographic and social context.

Table 6: Summary Statistics for Homicides in Eastern Jamaica (2010-2023)

Division	Total Homicides (2010-2023)	Average per Year	Minimum	Maximum	Standard Deviation
Kingston Eastern	1,067	76.2	62	88	7.4
St. Andrew East	1,331	95.1	85	112	8.2
St. Thomas	344	24.6	20	30	3.2
St. Mary	157	11.2	9	15	1.9
Portland	80	5.7	4	8	1.3
Eastern Jamaica (Total)	2,979	212.8	-	-	-

Correlation Between Violence and Socioeconomic Indicators

To explore the potential socioeconomic drivers of violence, correlations were calculated between the annual homicide rates and the unemployment and poverty rates from STATIN data. Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation matrix.

The homicide rate demonstrated a strong positive correlation with the unemployment rate ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that years with higher unemployment were associated with higher homicide rates. Similarly, the homicide rate correlated moderately with poverty levels ($r = 0.63$,

$p < 0.05$). The unemployment and poverty rates themselves were also strongly correlated ($r = 0.85$, $p < 0.01$), underscoring the intertwined nature of economic hardship in the region.

These findings reinforce the widely supported theory that economic deprivation fuels crime by exacerbating social tensions, limiting legitimate economic opportunities, and undermining community cohesion (UNODC, 2020). They also align with World Bank (2021) analyses, emphasising the need to address structural economic issues as part of comprehensive violence reduction strategies.

Table 7: Correlation Matrix of Homicide Rate, Unemployment Rate, and Poverty Rate (2010-2023)

Variable	Homicide Rate	Unemployment Rate	Poverty Rate
Homicide Rate	1	0.72**	0.63*
Unemployment Rate	0.72**	1	0.85**
Poverty Rate	0.63*	0.85**	1

*Note: ** $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$

Discussion

The findings from this study indicate a clear downward trend in homicide and violent crime rates in Eastern Jamaica between 2010 and 2023. This encouraging development suggests that various crime prevention efforts, including enhanced policing, community-based programmes, and social interventions, may be having a positive impact. The Jamaica Constabulary Force (2023) has reported increased investment in community policing and targeted operations, which likely contributed to this reduction. However, despite these gains, the homicide rate remains alarmingly high compared to the global average (UNODC, 2022), highlighting that violence continues to pose a significant public health and safety challenge in the region.

A key insight from the study is the strong positive correlation between homicide rates and unemployment in Eastern Jamaica. This relationship aligns with existing theories, such as Strain Theory, which argues that limited legitimate economic opportunities and high unemployment generate frustration and stress, which may push individuals toward criminal activities as coping mechanisms (Merton, 1938). Given that unemployment rates have remained relatively high in parts of Eastern Jamaica, these findings underscore the importance of economic policy and employment generation in violence prevention.

Similarly, the positive correlation between poverty rates and violence in the region confirms that economic deprivation is a significant driver of crime. Poverty can erode social cohesion and exacerbate vulnerabilities, increasing individuals' likelihood of engaging in violence or falling victim to it. This matter is consistent with the Social Disorganisation Theory perspective, which posits that disadvantaged communities with weak social institutions are more prone to crime (Shaw & McKay, 1942). Hence, social policies aimed at poverty reduction, improved education, and community empowerment are critical complements to policing strategies.

While the decline in violent crime is promising, the persistently elevated rates relative to international benchmarks reveal structural challenges that are deeply entrenched. Factors such as

unequal wealth distribution, limited access to quality education, and inadequate social services in Eastern Jamaica may perpetuate cycles of violence. The findings support calls from international agencies like the World Bank (2021), which advocate for holistic, multisectoral approaches that integrate economic development, social welfare, and security sector reform to address the root causes of violence.

It is also important to recognise the limitations inherent in this study's reliance on secondary data. Official crime statistics may underreport actual crime incidence due to non-reporting, data collection inconsistencies, or classification issues. Furthermore, the correlational design precludes causal inferences; other unmeasured variables—such as gang activity, substance abuse, and social norms—may also influence violence but were beyond the scope of this analysis. Future research would benefit from mixed-method approaches, incorporating qualitative insights and spatial analysis to explore neighbourhood-level dynamics in more depth.

Moreover, policy implications from this study point toward the necessity of integrated interventions. Law enforcement alone cannot sustainably reduce violence without parallel efforts to alleviate unemployment and poverty. Investments in vocational training, entrepreneurship, and education can provide alternative pathways for at-risk populations. Community-led initiatives that strengthen social capital and informal social controls may also enhance resilience against violence. The alignment of security policies with economic and social development frameworks is thus essential.

This study contributes to the understanding of violence in Eastern Jamaica by demonstrating a decline in violent crime alongside clear links to socioeconomic deprivation. The evidence supports the theoretical frameworks of Social Disorganisation and Strain Theory, reinforcing that addressing violence requires tackling both structural and individual-level factors. Policymakers and stakeholders must prioritise comprehensive strategies that simultaneously promote social cohesion, economic opportunity, and effective policing to build safer communities in Eastern Jamaica.

Conclusion

Violence in Eastern Jamaica, though often overshadowed by trends in the island's urban centres, represents a significant and nuanced public health and development concern. This study has demonstrated that while the parishes of Portland, St. Mary, and St. Thomas report lower aggregate homicide levels than parishes like Kingston or St. James, they are not immune to violence. Instead, the patterns observed between 2010 and 2023 reflect the spatial concentration of homicides in select communities, suggesting the need for targeted rather than generalised interventions. Furthermore, the correlation between homicide rates and socioeconomic variables—such as poverty and unemployment—highlights the intersection of structural deprivation and community vulnerability.

The application of Social Disorganisation Theory and Strain Theory has proven relevant in interpreting the observed trends. Communities experiencing institutional breakdown, low civic participation, and intergenerational poverty face a greater risk of violence, in line with Shaw and McKay's conceptualisation of social disorganisation. Likewise, Merton's notion of strain,

particularly among young males with limited access to legitimate means of achieving success, helps contextualise the appeal of crime in economically marginalised settings. These theoretical lenses reinforce the conclusion that addressing violence requires a comprehensive approach rooted in social development and institutional strengthening, not merely increased policing.

In line with regional and international literature, the findings support the idea that violence is both a cause and a consequence of underdevelopment. Poverty, unemployment, weak state capacity, and inequality act as both risk factors and reinforcing mechanisms. Eastern Jamaica's unique mix of rural geography, economic dependency on agriculture and informal markets, and historical neglect by central governance structures creates a situation where violence, though less visible, remains a persistent threat. This recognition underscores the importance of tailoring violence prevention efforts to local contexts, as solutions successful in urban areas may be ill-suited to more dispersed and resource-constrained rural parishes.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the evidence base for policy design by providing empirical insights into violence trends in a region often overlooked in crime and development discourses. It advocates for a paradigm shift towards inclusive, community-centred strategies that acknowledge and address the underlying socioeconomic and structural drivers of violence. Future research should incorporate mixed-method approaches, community voice, and real-time data to ensure policy responses remain dynamic and rooted in the lived realities of residents in Eastern Jamaica.

Policy Recommendations

Addressing the persistent violence in Eastern Jamaica requires an integrated policy approach that goes beyond traditional law enforcement to tackle the structural and social determinants underpinning crime. First, government agencies should prioritise **community development initiatives** that enhance social cohesion and rebuild informal social controls in vulnerable neighbourhoods. This can be achieved through investments in community centres, youth clubs, and local leadership training, fostering environments where collective efficacy can flourish and social disorganisation is reduced.

Secondly, economic empowerment strategies are essential. Policies that target **youth unemployment and poverty alleviation** must be scaled up, including skills training, entrepreneurship programmes, and access to microfinance, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. Given the strong association found between economic deprivation and violence, providing legitimate pathways for economic advancement can mitigate the strains that contribute to criminal behaviour.

Third, strengthening local institutional capacity is crucial. Police divisions covering Eastern Jamaica require enhanced resources, training, and community policing models that promote trust and cooperation between residents and law enforcement. The adoption of data-driven policing strategies that focus on hotspot identification and proactive engagement could improve crime prevention while reducing tensions between communities and police.

Fourth, educational interventions must form a core part of the violence reduction framework. Efforts to reduce school dropout rates and improve the quality and accessibility of education in

Eastern Jamaica will address some of the root causes of social disorganisation and economic marginalisation. Schools can also serve as sites for violence prevention programmes and psychosocial support, especially for at-risk youth.

Fifth, inter-agency collaboration is paramount. Crime prevention in Eastern Jamaica should involve coordinated efforts between government ministries (e.g., Education, Health, Social Development), civil society organisations, and community groups. Such partnerships can ensure comprehensive responses that integrate social services, mental health support, and economic development, thereby addressing the multidimensional nature of violence.

Finally, continuous monitoring and research must underpin policy implementation. Establishing a regional data repository with real-time crime and socioeconomic indicators will support evidence-based decision-making and allow for the timely adjustment of strategies. Furthermore, involving communities in participatory research and evaluation will enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of interventions designed to reduce violence.

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