



# STAYING INFORMED: Violent crime in Alton

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March 22 2017 1:06 PM

**ALTON** - With the upcoming April 4 mayoral election just around the bend, the subject of violent crime in Alton has been broached several times in various community forums.

Mayoral candidate Scott Dixon has been the most vocal regarding the crime statistics, even saying violent crime in Alton is at a five-year high under the administration of current Alton Mayor Brant Walker, who is also running for reelection. Candidates Joshua Young and Dan Rauschkolb, a 22-year veteran of the Alton Police Department currently at the rank of lieutenant, are also vocal about solving crime - citing a need for community support, police accountability and, possibly most importantly, safe and strong neighborhoods. In this political climate, however, facts are becoming more and more important. Because of that, Riverbender.com is going to provide an in-depth look at what violent crime in Alton looks like.

Firstly, the FBI's definition of "violent crime" is this: In the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program, violent crime is composed of four offenses: murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault. Violent crimes are defined in the Uniform Crime Reporting Program as those offenses, which involve force or threat of force.

Secondly, the FBI's definition of "rape" changed when it began reporting the 2013 numbers. According to the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services Division Uniform Crime Reporting Program document "Reporting Rape in 2013 Summary Reporting System User Manual and Technical Specification," dated April 9, 2014, the FBI itself has expanded the definition of rape.

This definition expansion was approved in Dec. 2011 by former FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III, and changed from strictly forcible male and female genital penetration to the following: "Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body

part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim." According to the document, this revision was done through a collaboration of both law enforcement and victims' rights group.

It is important to note this change, because it reflects a definitive change in the violent crime statistics given to the FBI by local governments.

So is violent crime in Alton at its highest point in five years? Only the numbers can answer that question. Neither Dixon's assertions or Walker's defenses can paint an entire picture. The FBI does not have the 2016 data currently for Alton, but the city provided its crime numbers to Riverbender.com.

These are the violent crime numbers in 2016, according to the City of Alton:

- Murder - 2
- Rape - 28
- Robbery - 31
- Aggravated Assault/Battery - 82
- Total: 143

Here are the violent crime numbers in 2015, according to the FBI:

- Murder - 1
- Rape - 26
- Robbery - 31
- Aggravated Assault/Battery: 74
- Total: 132

Given these numbers, violent crime has increased from 2015-2016 by the following amounts:

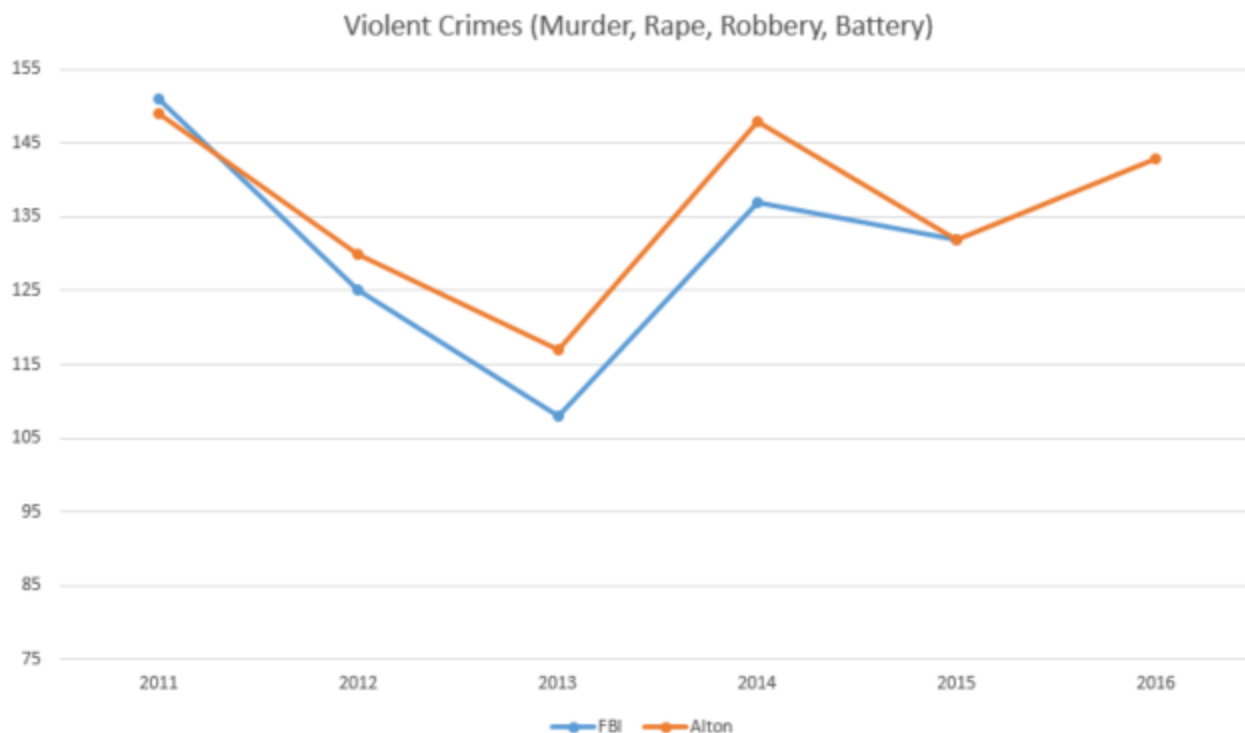
- Murder - Up 50 percent
- Rape - Up 7.2 percent
- Robbery - No change
- Aggravated Assault/Battery - Up 9.8 percent
- Total - Up 7.7 percent

So, when comparing the city's numbers from 2016 to the FBI's numbers from 2015, all violent crimes except robbery have shown an increase.

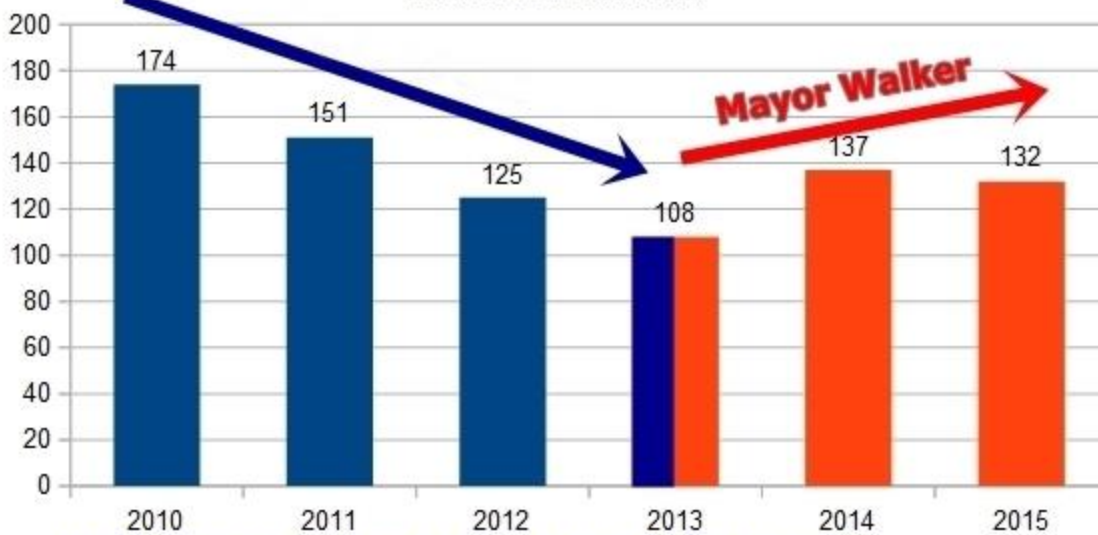
Here are the violent crime numbers in Alton for the last five years:

- 2016 - 143 (according to the city)
- 2015 - 132
- 2014 - 137
- 2013 - 108
- 2012 - 125

Assuming the FBI backs the city's numbers, Dixon's assertion Alton's violent crime is at its highest point is true. It must be noted, however, the city itself reported 148 violent crimes in 2014, compared to the FBI's calculation of 137. Therefore, according to the city's own numbers, violent crime was the highest in 2014 looking at the last five years. The reason for the discrepancy is not known at this time.



## Violent Crime - Alton source: FBI crime data



**Violent crime declined almost 40% before Walker, but has increased 22% since Walker took office in May 2013.**

*Source: official FBI crime data by city, table 8.*

Walker asserted overall crime in Alton, which includes violent crime as well as property crime, has decreased by as much as 11 percent during his time in office, and he's right. He said his administration witnessed an increase in "nuisance crimes" - such as theft of copper wiring - which Alton Police Chief Jake Simmons said were related to drug use and addiction. To remedy this, the department added another drug detective and utilized more confidential informants - a move, which has lowered those "nuisance crime"

Violent Crimes	City of Alton 2009	FBI Crime Statistics 2010	City of Alton 2010	FBI Crime Statistics 2011	City of Alton 2011	FBI Crime Statistics 2012	City of Alton 2012	FBI Crime Statistics 2013	City of Alton 2013	FBI Crime Statistics 2014	City of Alton 2014	FBI Crime Statistics 2015	City of Alton 2015	City of Alton 2016
Murder	2	4	4	4	4	3	3	0	1	2	2	1	1	2
Rape	23	16	13	20	16	14	13	9	11	16	21	26	26	28
Robbery	63	27	27	36	33	40	43	34	34	29	30	31	31	31
Battery	208	127	101	91	96	68	71	65	71	90	95	74	74	82
Burglary	294	292	303	350	364	326	340	309	319	244	254	291	291	266
Theft	980	913	991	987	1,031	861	896	912	939	889	916	985	985	761
Motor Vehicle Theft	75	60	62	52	52	43	43	51	50	65	65	52	52	46
Arson	15	12	10	11	10	10	11	3	3	8	9	12	12	5

numbers.

## What can be done about these numbers?

As of yet, no specific motion has been done by the city to decrease violent crimes in Alton, but the city has allowed former St. Louis Police Chief and current University of Missouri St. Louis instructor Daniel Isom to conduct a full-scale comprehensive

community policing study, utilizing both the police department and the community to hold each other accountable for the safety and policing practices of the city. All four of the men running for mayor said they would continue to commit the city to its program, as of the latest candidate forums.

During that survey, Altonians were asked to rate several issues in the city and how well the police department handles them. These are the average ratings 1,264 survey-takers gave city issues on a sliding scale from one to four, with one being inadequate, two being somewhat adequate, three being adequate and four being very adequate. Also included are the amounts of people who rated each issue and what ratings they chose most:

- Sexual Assault: 2.30 (1-165, 2-254, 3-237 and 4-75)
- Assault: 2.25 (1-196, 2-267, 3-245 and 4-75)
- Domestic Violence: 2.20 (1-201, 2-260, 3-221 and 4-65)
- Street Violence: 2.18 (1-212, 2-299, 3-215 and 4-71)

Alton Community Relations Commission President Peter Hough said the 1,264 survey-takers came from very diverse backgrounds and neighborhoods in Alton, so these numbers are a pretty accurate representation of how the city views the way its department handles the issues of violent crime, which ranges from "somewhat adequate" to "adequate."

The Alton Police Department was also given an internal survey, which 69 percent of employees from officers to jailers to records keepers completed. That survey showed the department does not have a high degree of trust in its leadership team and could use some work with communication. In fact, on a scale from one to five, with one being very low and five being excellent, the police department rated trust in its leadership team, which listed everyone from lieutenants, the captain and the chief, meaning employees were asked about the entire staff, 1.91, which is almost "low" from "very low." It also rated having a "culture of open, candid communication" at 1.94.

That survey also identified these following major issues in the police department:

- Staffing needs
- Inadequate budget
- Ineffective communication
- Department morale
- Training needs
- Equipment needs
- Recruiting process
- Community relationships

A focus group, consisting of employees of the Alton Police Department chose these top three issues as where the department most needs to improve.

- Communication and Morale
- Accountability and Performance
- Talent Management

It is impossible to know if these changes would lower the violent crime number, however. It is impossible to know if a change of administration would do so, either. Besides the community policing platform, candidate Rauschkolb, a police officer himself, said his administration would work to improve neighborhoods and create a Heroin Task Force to alleviate crime issues in Alton.

According to the community-wide survey conducted by Isom and consultant Steve Finkelstein, Altonians believe they have at least somewhat adequate safe neighborhoods - rating that issue 2.43 on the survey. Drug issues, however, were rated the lowest on the survey - at 1.89. Rauschkolb said several other crime issues spawn from drug problems and said the department deals with a devastating amount of overdoses from heroin and other opiates. While drug issues are not violent crimes, Rauschkolb hopes alleviating them will help all crimes in Alton decrease.

Rauschkolb as well as his fellow candidate Joshua Young have both said they would work for a youth center to give kids a place to go, something to do and mentors. Young calls people already working toward these issues "champions." Unfortunately, however, one of those "champions," Brian Newman, was arrested for gun and drug charges following the unveiling of his "Fists Up, Guns Down" initiative, which was designed to invite people to settle disputes through one-on-one boxing matches instead of turning to guns.

Simmons even said the department would supply equipment to the movement if it was able to secure a safe location, could fund and provide insurance and have well-vetted trainers and mentors. Since Newman's arrest, however, both Young and Simmons said they were still hopeful for such a program to take place under better leadership.

In fact, each of the candidates seem to agree with each other on one aspect of Alton's public safety: a basis in community. Walker himself has showcased several initiatives to better improve community relations with the police department. Programs such as "Shop with a Cop," "Coffee with a Cop," "Ballin' with a Cop," the "Summons of Joy" and "Pizza with a Cop" are methods to bring the community closer with police officers so they can build a safer Alton together.

Isom's community policing initiative also took into account the community's feelings toward the police department. In the survey, the community rated its trust with the police department at 2.67, which is between poor and good. As many as 30 community leaders with diverse backgrounds and occupations came together for a community focus group, following that survey, which identified the following issues in the community and police department:

- Racial diversity in the police department
- Youth activities
- Drugs and alcohol
- Police/Community relationships and policies/procedures.

Following both the community and police focus groups, a joint workshop was created with members from both of the groups. That workshop identified three main areas of focus for both the department and the community. Those were:

- Communication/Positive Interactions Between the Community and the Police
- Education and Awareness
- Police Department Diversity

The Alton Community Relations Commission promised it would hold stakeholders accountable for solutions to those issues. Representatives from both the police department and community have been given leadership roles in tackling each of those issues, and people from the community are invited to hold both the community leaders and police department accountable if an issue does not show positive growth.

Given these numbers and goals compiled entirely from the community with no political motive to be gained mirror the concerns, promises and policies of each of the four men currently running for mayor, it can be demonstrated Alton has an awareness and plan to address those numbers regardless of the election's ultimate winner.

Yes, Dixon is correct. Violent crime is a problem in Alton.

Yes, Walker is correct. Overall crime has decreased in Alton during his administration.

Yes, Rauschkolb is correct. People in Alton would like safer neighborhoods, safe places for their children to go after school, and are very concerned about what they feel is a less-than-adequate approach to the drug issue in Alton.

Yes, Young is correct. The community would like more police accountability and grassroots initiatives to take their neighborhoods away from criminal elements.

Riverbender.com did not reach out to any of the candidates regarding this article.