

# Phoenix's Motorcycle Toll

We ranked America's 12 most populous counties by how fast they lose motorcyclists. Maricopa County, the heart of metro Phoenix, came out first.

# 569

motorcyclists killed in Maricopa County, 2020 to 2024.

#1 OF AMERICA'S 12 BIGGEST COUNTIES.  
12.48 DEATHS PER 100,000 RESIDENTS.

## WHO READS THE DATA

We read the crash record the way we read a case: the riders, the rate, and the pattern underneath them.

AZ Law Now pulled the federal fatality record and the Census population counts and computed the per-capita motorcyclist death rate ourselves, for Maricopa County and every one of America's 12 largest counties. It names no one and sells nothing. It just shows the work.

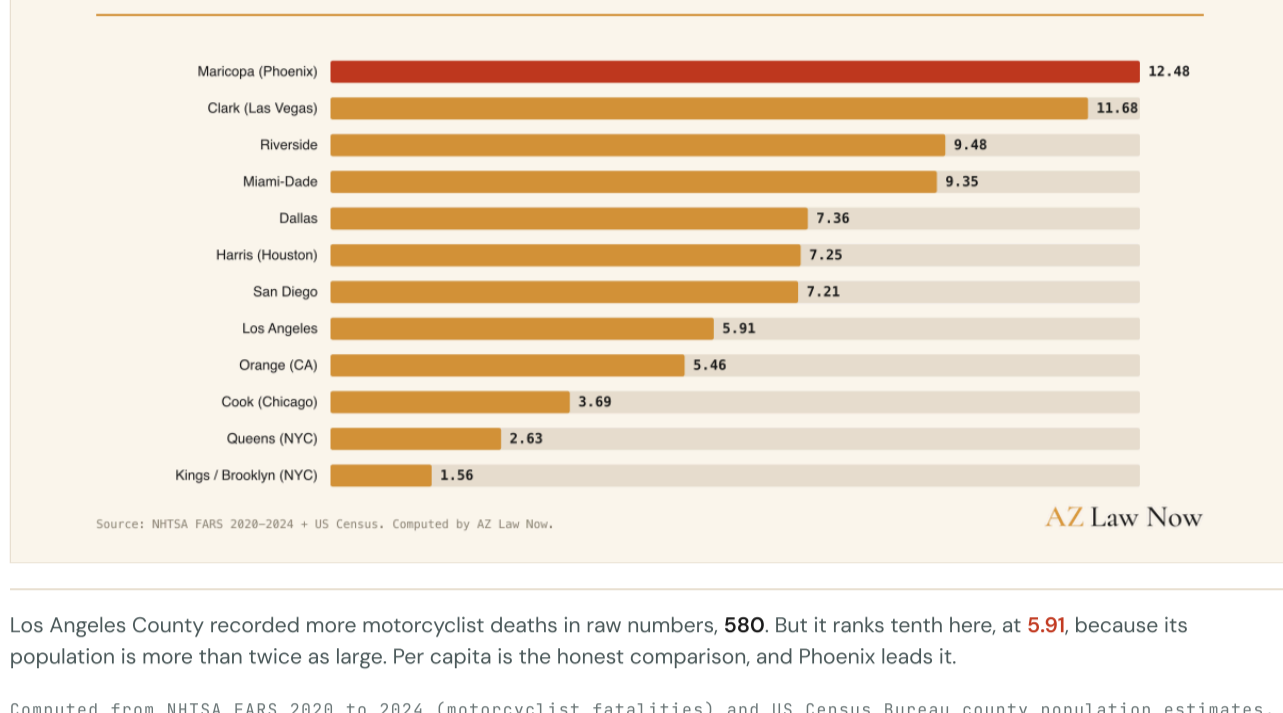
## 01 No big county loses riders faster, not even Las Vegas

OUR ANALYSIS

We ranked America's 12 most populous counties by their motorcyclist death rate over five years. Maricopa County, the heart of metro Phoenix, came out first. From 2020 through 2024, 569 motorcyclists were killed here, a rate of 12.48 deaths per 100,000 residents.

<p>DEATH RATE · RANK</p> <p>#1</p> <h1>12.48</h1> <p>motorcyclist deaths per 100,000 residents, 2020 to 2024. The highest of America's 12 biggest counties.</p> <p>Computed · FARS + Census</p>	<p>RIDERS KILLED</p> <h1>569</h1> <p>motorcyclists killed in Maricopa County across the five years, the basis of the rate.</p> <p>NHTSA FARS, 2020 to 2024</p>	<p>LAS VEGAS · #2</p> <h1>11.68</h1> <p>Clark County's rate. Phoenix edges it. No other big county comes closer.</p> <p>Computed · FARS + Census</p>	<p>CHICAGO</p> <h1>3.69</h1> <p>Cook County's rate. Maricopa runs more than three times as high.</p> <p>Computed · FARS + Census</p>
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Maricopa tops every one of America's 12 largest counties.



Los Angeles County recorded more motorcyclist deaths in raw numbers, 580. But it ranks tenth here, at 5.91, because its population is more than twice as large. Per capita is the honest comparison, and Phoenix leads it.

Computed from NHTSA FARS 2020 to 2024 (motorcyclist fatalities) and US Census Bureau county population estimates. Rate = five-year death count over five-year-average resident population, per 100,000.

"The 12 most populous counties" is a transparent, rule-based set, drawn straight from Census population, not a list we hand-picked to put Phoenix on top. The finding does not depend on where we drew the line. **Widen the field to every US county above 1.5 million residents and Maricopa is still first**, with Tampa's Hillsborough County the closest challenger at 12.28. The #1 holds.

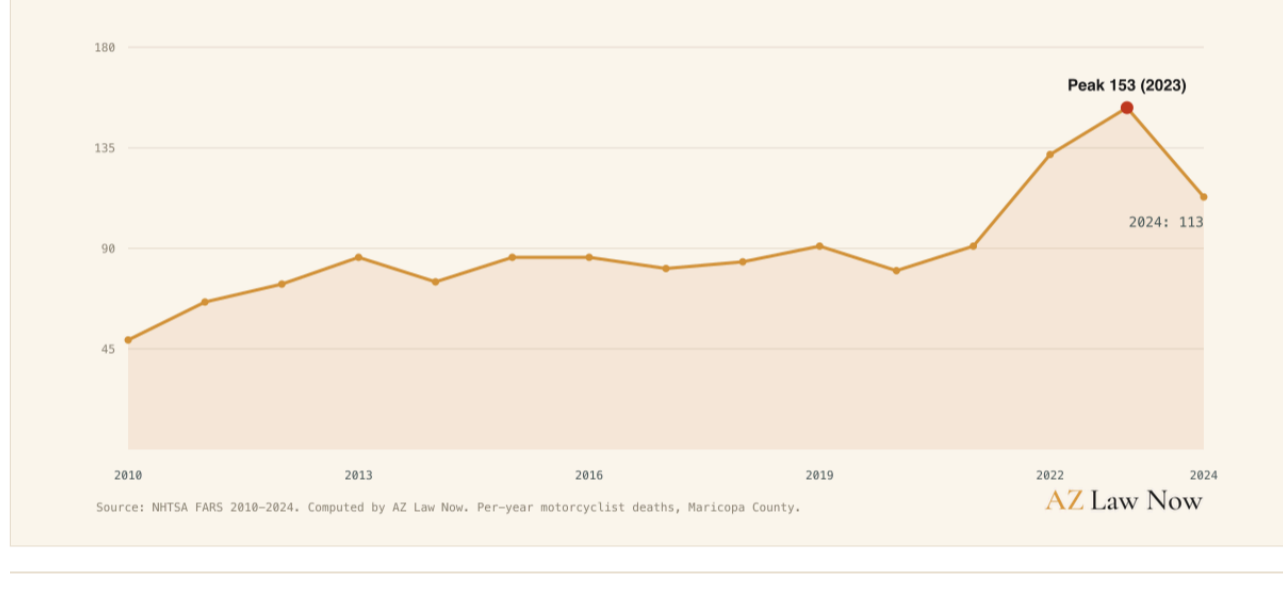
## 02 And the toll is climbing

OUR ANALYSIS

This is not a flat line that Phoenix happens to sit on top of. Maricopa's motorcyclist death rate has climbed across the decade, from 8.86 per 100,000 in 2010 to 2014, to 9.89 in 2015 to 2019, to 12.48 in 2020 to 2024.

<p>DECADE RISE · RATE</p> <h1>+41%</h1> <p>rise in the death rate across the decade, from 8.86 to 12.48 per 100,000.</p> <p>Computed · FARS + Census</p>	<p>2010 DEATHS</p> <h1>49</h1> <p>motorcyclists killed in a single year at the start of the decade.</p> <p>NHTSA FARS, 2010</p>	<p>2023 PEAK</p> <h1>153</h1> <p>the worst single year on record, more than triple the 2010 count.</p> <p>NHTSA FARS, 2023</p>	<p>2024</p> <h1>113</h1> <p>deaths in the most recent year, still well above where the decade began.</p> <p>NHTSA FARS, 2024</p>
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Single-year deaths climbed from 49 in 2010 to a peak of 153 in 2023.



It echoes a pattern we found on foot. Our 25-year pedestrian analysis shows Arizona's pedestrian toll bending sharply upward after 2014, and the motorcyclist line bends the same way over the same years. Whatever changed on these roads, the people most exposed to it, on two wheels or on foot, are the ones paying.

Computed from NHTSA FARS 2010 to 2024 (motorcyclist fatalities, Maricopa County). Five-year-window rates use Census population denominators.

## 03 The danger is everywhere, not one corner

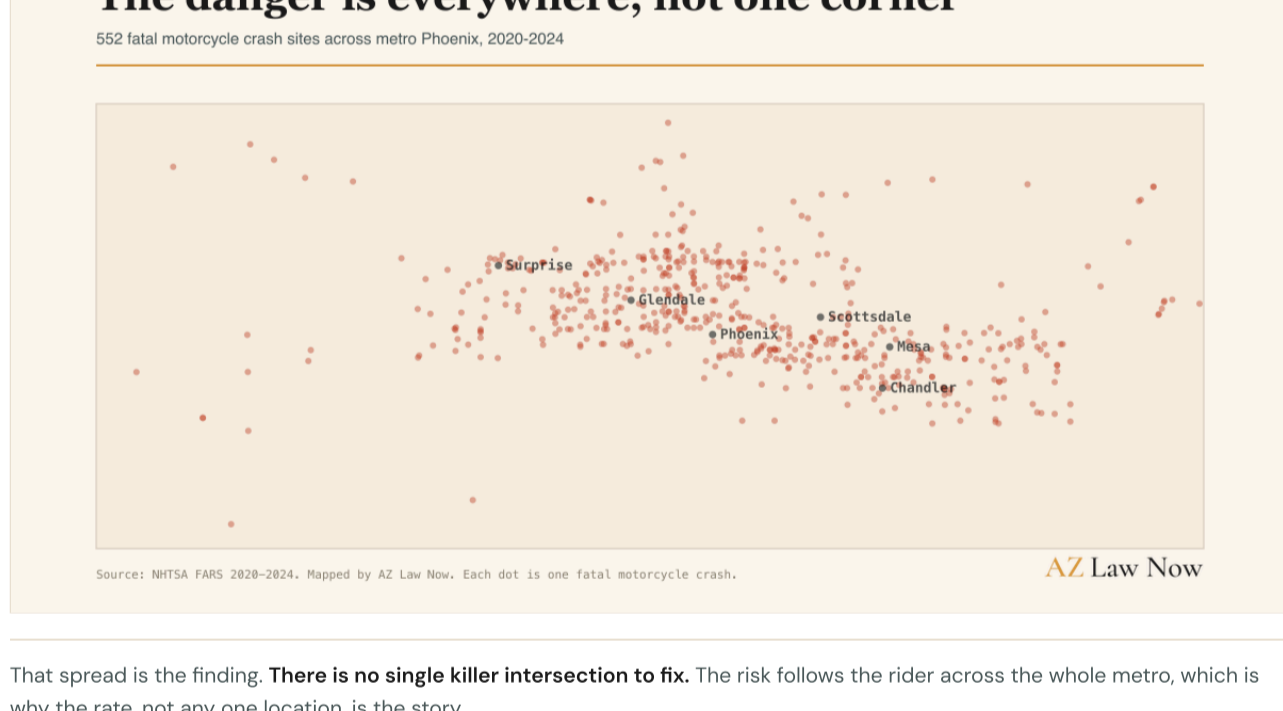
OUR ANALYSIS

Some road dangers concentrate. Our pedestrian work found a single corridor, Indian School Road, that outranked every other road in the county. Motorcyclist deaths do not concentrate like that.

Map the 552 fatal motorcycle crash sites from 2020 to 2024 and they spread across the entire valley, on the freeways and the wide arterials alike, from Surprise in the northwest to Chandler in the southeast.

Computed from NHTSA FARS 2020 to 2024, Maricopa County, fatal motorcycle crashes with mapped coordinates.

552 fatal crash sites, spread across the whole metro.



That spread is the finding. There is no single killer intersection to fix. The risk follows the rider across the whole metro, which is why the rate, not any one location, is the story.

Computed from NHTSA FARS 2020 to 2024, Maricopa County. Each point is a fatal motorcycle crash location.

Put the three findings together: the deadliest big county in the country to ride, a toll that's still climbing, and a danger that follows the rider everywhere. The rate is the story.

## WHAT THIS MEANS

Among the biggest counties in the country, none is deadlier to ride a motorcycle than metro Phoenix, and the gap is widening. Knowing that the risk follows the rider across the whole valley, and that it's growing, protects families and the public.

# We read the record so you get answers.

QUESTIONS ABOUT ARIZONA'S ROADS? YOU GET ANSWERS

(602) 654-0202

## 04 How we built this

### METHODOLOGY

<p>PRIMARY SOURCES ONLY</p> <p>Every figure traces to a named federal dataset: NHTSA's FARS, the federal record of every traffic death, for the motorcyclist counts (2010 to 2024), and the US Census Bureau's county population estimates for the denominators. We read the source, not the news write-up.</p>	<p>WE COMPUTED THE RATES</p> <p>The per-capita rates and the county ranking are ours. A motorcyclist death is a person killed (fatal injury) on a motorcycle body type, counted at the person level. We divided the five-year death count by the five-year-average resident population, per 100,000, applied identically to every county. These are not NHTSA-published figures.</p>	<p>WE STATED THE UNIVERSE</p> <p>A ranking ships only with a transparent, rule-based set. The universe is "the 12 most populous US counties," drawn from Census, and all 12 are shown. We re-tested the #1 against larger and higher-rate counties left out of the top 12, and it holds down to any county above 1.5 million residents.</p>
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THE TWO CAVEATS WE WANT PLAINLY

First, "Phoenix" here means Maricopa County, the core county of the metro, a stand-in for the metro area and not the city limits. Second, the rate is a five-year cumulative count over the five-year-average population, so it reads about five times higher than a single-year rate would. The same construction is applied identically to every county in the comparison, so the ranking is a fair like-for-like read. The analysis reproduces from a single script over the raw federal files, so any figure can be rebuilt from the record.

### PROVENANCE LEDGER · EVERY HEADLINE NUMBER

MEASURED | read directly from a published dataset. COMPUTED | our calculation from the federal counts. VERIFIED | re-tested against the omitted-county attack.

HEADLINE FIGURE	PROVENANCE	SOURCE
Maricopa #1 of the 12 most populous US counties for motorcyclist death rate	COMPUTED	NHTSA FARS 2020 to 2024 + US Census population estimates
12.48 deaths per 100,000 residents - 569 motorcyclists killed, 2020 to 2024	COMPUTED	NHTSA FARS 2020 to 2024 + US Census population estimates
Ahead of Las Vegas (11.68) and more than 3x Chicago (3.69)	COMPUTED	NHTSA FARS 2020 to 2024 + US Census (Clark, Cook counties)
LA more raw deaths (580) but 10th per capita (5.91)	COMPUTED	NHTSA FARS 2020 to 2024 + US Census (Los Angeles County)
Rank holds down to any US county above 1.5M residents (Hillsborough near-#2 at 12.28)	VERIFIED	NHTSA FARS 2020 to 2024 + US Census (omitted-county re-test)
+41% decade rise - 8.86 (2010 to 2014) to 12.48 (2020 to 2024) per 100,000	COMPUTED	NHTSA FARS 2010 to 2024 + US Census population estimates
Single-year deaths: 49 (2010) to a peak of 153 (2023) to 113 (2024)	MEASURED	NHTSA FARS, Maricopa County, by year
552 fatal motorcycle crash sites mapped across metro Phoenix, no single corridor	COMPUTED	NHTSA FARS 2020 to 2024, Maricopa County, mapped coordinates

### REFERENCES

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. (2025). *Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) 2010 to 2024 national file* [Data set]. U.S. Department of Transportation. <https://www-fars.nhtsa.dot.gov/>

U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). *County population totals and components of change, 2020 to 2024 (Population Estimates Program, Vintage 2024)*. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest.html>

A motorcyclist death is a person killed (fatal injury) on a motorcycle body type in the NHTSA FARS file, counted at the person level. Per-capita rates and the county ranking are computed by AZ Law Now from the FARS counts over US Census population denominators; they are not NHTSA-published statistics. Rates are a five-year cumulative death count over the five-year-average resident population, per 100,000, applied identically to every county. "Phoenix" means Maricopa County, the core county of the metro, not the city limits. This report is public-interest data journalism, not legal advice, and creates no attorney-client relationship.