



The Recent Rise in Violent Crime Is Driven by Gun Violence

By Eugenio Weigend Vargas June 3, 2022

The rising violent crime rates over the past two years is a major issue that elected officials must address immediately. While many have blamed the criminal justice reform movement for the rise in violent crime, the fact is that these increases in violent crime can largely be attributed to an alarming escalation in gun violence. If elected officials are serious about stopping violent crime, they need to prioritize and support stronger gun laws.

This fact sheet provides telling data on the link between gun violence and rising crime rates.

Rising crime rates are almost entirely driven by an increase in gun-related homicides

- From 2019 to 2020, homicides increased a staggering 28 percent.¹ This sharp increase was driven by a dramatic rise in gun-related homicides:
 - While nonfirearm homicides increased less than 10 percent from 2019 to 2020, gun homicides rose by 35 percent, the largest annual increase ever recorded.²
 - In 2020, 8 out of every 10 homicides were perpetrated with a gun, the highest proportion in recent years.³
- Unfortunately, the rise in gun homicides continued through 2021: Preliminary data suggest an additional 7 percent increase in gun homicides from 2020 to 2021.⁴

Rates of gun homicides have increased dramatically among children and teenagers

- Because of this increase, gun deaths are now the leading cause of death for children and teenagers:
 - From 2019 to 2020, the rate of gun homicides among children and teenagers ages 1 to 19 rose by 40 percent.⁵
 - In 2019, gun deaths surpassed vehicle-related accidents to become the leading cause of death for children and teens.⁶

Nonfatal gunshot injuries are also on the rise

- While data are limited, evidence suggests a rise in nonfatal shootings in recent years:
 - A survey conducted by the Police Executive Research Forum indicates that 70 percent of agencies reported an increase in nonfatal shootings from 2019 to 2020.⁷

Firearms are frequently used to threaten people during other violent crimes

- From 2019 to 2020, there were more than 820,000 violent crimes involving firearms—primarily robberies and aggravated assaults.⁸ This means that every day, more than 1,100 people were threatened with a gun.⁹

As gun crimes and the gun homicide rate have increased, the number of mass shootings has also grown considerably

- Mass shootings increased 46 percent from 2019 to 2020 and another 13 percent from 2020 to 2021.¹⁰
- Unfortunately, data suggest that the number of mass shootings in 2022 will surpass 500—more than one shooting per day.¹¹
- Assault weapons have been found to be used in 16 percent of mass shootings, which has significantly increased the number of victims and fatalities:¹²
 - According to Everytown for Gun Safety, when assault weapons were used in a mass shooting from 2009 to 2020, six times more people were shot compared with shootings that involved other weapons.¹³
 - Assault weapons have been the common denominator in the deadliest mass shootings in the past 10 years:
 - Uvalde, Texas (2022): 21 people killed
 - El Paso, Texas (2019): 23 people killed
 - Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (2018): 11 people killed
 - Parkland, Texas (2017): 17 people killed
 - Las Vegas, Nevada (2017): 58 people killed
 - Sutherland Springs, Texas (2017): 26 people killed
 - San Bernardino, California (2015): 14 people killed
 - Orlando, Florida (2016): 49 people killed
 - Aurora, Colorado (2012): 12 people killed
 - Newtown, Connecticut (2012): 27 people killed

Violent crime and homicide rates are worse in states with weaker gun laws

- States that received an “F” grade based on the strength of their gun laws—according to the latest scorecard from the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence—saw the highest homicide rates:¹⁴
 - States with “F” grades saw 25 percent higher homicide rates than states with “C” or “D” grades.¹⁵
 - States with “F” grades saw 61 percent higher homicide rates than states with “A” or “B” grades—states with the strongest gun laws.¹⁶
- Children and teenagers are most vulnerable in states with weaker gun laws:
 - In 2020, the 10 states with the highest rates of gun deaths among children and teenagers ages 1 to 19 were Louisiana, Alaska, Mississippi, South Carolina, Arkansas, Kansas, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, and Alabama.¹⁷ All of these states received an “F” grade for their weak gun laws.

- Reports also suggest that rates of nonfatal gunshot injuries sustained during assaults are higher in states with weaker gun laws:
 - In 2017, the year with available data across states, states that received an “F” grade had a rate of nonfatal gunshot injuries that was 22 percent higher than states with “C” or “D” grades and 59 percent higher than states with “A” or “B” grades.¹⁸

Conclusion

Every day, more than 50 people are murdered with a gun and another 1,100 are threatened during a violent crime. As a result, the United States has the highest level of gun violence across developed nations, with mass shootings occurring at a daily rate.¹⁹

We cannot continue living like this. Elected officials must stop circumventing gun violence by putting blame on the criminal justice reform movement. If they are serious about stopping crime, gun violence prevention laws must be on the top of their agendas.

Endnotes

- 1 Center for American Progress analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Injury Prevention & Control: Data & Statistics (WISQARS): Fatal Injury Data,” available at <https://wisqars.cdc.gov/fatal-reports> (last accessed May 2022).
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Center for American Progress analysis of Gun Violence Archive, “Past Summary Ledgers,” available at <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/past-tolls> (last accessed May 2022).
- 5 Center for American Progress analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Injury Prevention & Control: Data & Statistics (WISQARS): Fatal Injury Data.”
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Police Executive Research Forum, “Nonfatal Shootings,” available at <https://www.policeforum.org/critical-issues26jan21> (last accessed May 2022).
- 8 Rachel E. Morgan and Alexandra Thompson, “Criminal Victimization, 2020” (Washington: U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021), available at <https://bjs.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh236/files/media/document/cv20.pdf>.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Center for American Progress analysis of Gun Violence Archive, “Past Summary Ledgers.”
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Everytown for Gun Safety, “Mass Shootings in America,” available at <https://everytownresearch.org/maps/mass-shootings-in-america/#mass-shootings-involving-assault-weapons-or-high-capacity-magazines-were-far-deadlier>. (last accessed May 2022).
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 The following states received an “F” grade on the latest scorecard from the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, West Virginia, and Wyoming. See Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, “Annual Gun Law Scorecard,” available at <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/resources/scorecard/> (last accessed May 2022).
- 15 The following states received a “C” or “D” grade: Florida, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Vermont, and Wisconsin.
- 16 The following states received an “A” or “B” grade: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, and Washington.
- 17 Center for American Progress analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Injury Prevention & Control: Data & Statistics (WISQARS): Fatal Injury Data.”
- 18 Center for American Progress analysis of Everytown for Gun Safety, “EverStat: How does gun violence impact the communities you care about?,” available at <https://everystat.org/> (last accessed May 2022).
- 19 Center for American Progress analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Injury Prevention & Control: Data & Statistics (WISQARS): Fatal Injury Data”; Morgan and Thompson, “Criminal Victimization, 2020”; Center for American Progress analysis of Gun Violence Archive, “Past Summary Ledgers.”