



C A L I F O R N I A

DEPARTMENT of JUSTICE

# OFFICE OF GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

**DATA REPORT:  
THE IMPACT OF GUN VIOLENCE IN CALIFORNIA**

*AUGUST 2023*

*liberty  
and justice  
under law*



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## LETTER FROM ATTORNEY GENERAL BONTA

As Americans, we are proud of our exceptionalism on so many fronts—from our economic might to our military prowess, our democratic principles to our technological innovations and cultural icons—there is truly no place like the United States. Shamefully, we also stand apart from the rest of the world on another dark front: gun violence.

Gun violence is America's disease—a sickness that is traumatizing our communities and tearing our families apart.

In recent years, our nation has lost over 45,000 Americans to gun violence per year. I urge you to look beyond the statistic and see the tens of thousands of people, every year, who will no longer kiss their mothers, hug their siblings, hold their babies. People in the United States are 25 times more likely to be killed in a gun homicide than those living in other high-income countries. And, as a father of three, it's particularly heartbreaking to know that gun violence is the leading cause of death among our children and young adults.

The time for thoughts and prayers alone has come and gone. Enough became enough so long ago that it's now merely a faint memory. The time for action is now.

While California is not immune to this disease, thanks to our nation-leading, commonsense gun laws and prevention policies, we've made substantial progress. Our gun death rate is 43% below the rest of the nation and our children are safer from gun violence than in most other states. In fact, if the gun death rate in the rest of the U.S. matched California's over the last ten years, nearly 140,000 gun deaths could have been prevented.

The progress we've made is undeniable, but it's hardly finished. At the California Department of Justice, we will not stop until every community is safe from gun violence, because even one gun death, is one too many.

Since its inception, our Office of Gun Violence Prevention has become an invaluable asset in DOJ's multifaceted approach to addressing gun violence. In just one year, it has become a natural complement to the longstanding leadership of our Bureau of Firearms, Division of Law Enforcement, Office of Legislative Affairs, and our incredible team of attorneys—each of which plays a critical role in getting illegal guns off our streets, defending and strengthening our gun laws, and holding irresponsible gun industry members accountable for unlawful conduct in court.

By uplifting effective violence intervention strategies; serving as a hub of expertise; bringing survivors and stakeholders to the table; promoting collaboration between agencies; and publishing data reports like the one you're about to read, the Office of Gun Violence Prevention is helping to shine a light on this insidious problem and advance the bold action we need. With the Office's leadership, California DOJ has secured a sharp tool in our fight to end gun violence, protect public safety, and save lives.

While we are all inundated daily with news about shootings and violence, the individuals in the Office of Gun Violence Prevention and throughout California DOJ are unsung heroes you do not hear about. The public servants who prevent tragic news from breaking in the first place. I am deeply grateful for their tireless work and fortitude. As you read this report, know that as your California Attorney General, as a Californian, and as a dad, fighting for the safety and security of our communities and our children is, and will always be, my top priority. You have my word.

Thank you,



## ABOUT THE OFFICE OF GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Attorney General Bonta launched the California Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of Gun Violence Prevention (OGVP) with the mission of supporting data- and impact-driven efforts to effectively and equitably prevent gun violence and related traumas.

As this data report lays out, gun violence has devastating impacts across California and the nation—gunshot wounds are the leading cause of death for the American child today.<sup>1</sup> But public and private actions can make an enormous difference by reducing risk, increasing safety and well-being, interrupting cycles of violence, and proactively preventing tragedy.<sup>2</sup>

California is a leader in adopting new legislation and violence prevention programs that bolster safety and substantially reduce gun violence over the long-term. As this report lays out, California has substantially lower rates of firearm-related homicide, suicide, and overall firearm mortality compared to the national average. With new laws and programs also come new challenges and ongoing responsibilities for implementation, coordination, and public education across many different agencies, communities, and stakeholder groups.

The Office of Gun Violence Prevention works to support implementation, coordination, sustainability, and public understanding of these efforts by:

- Serving as an information resource hub for data, policy, and legal expertise on gun violence prevention matters within DOJ and with external stakeholders and the public.
- Serving as a liaison to survivors, advocates, researchers, community partners, and policymakers.
- Publishing data reports and materials about gun violence prevention policies, trends, impacts, research findings, and funding opportunities.
- Promoting coordination across different states, between California agencies, and with local and community-based partners.
- Uplifting effective policy interventions, safety planning tools, and evidence-based best practices.
- Identifying and proactively addressing gaps and barriers to success for gun violence prevention efforts.

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1 OGVP analysis of data from CDC WONDER database; see also, Matt McGough, et al, “Child and Teen Firearm Mortality in the U.S. and Peer Countries,” Kaiser Family Foundation (Jul. 18, 2023), <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/issue-brief/child-and-teen-firearm-mortality-in-the-u-s-and-peer-countries/>. In 2020, firearm-related injuries overtook motor vehicle accidents as the leading cause of death for US children aged 1-17, and remained the leading cause of death for this age group in 2021 and 2022.

2 See, e.g., April Zeoli, et al., “Analysis of the Strength of Legal Firearms Restrictions for Perpetrators of Domestic Violence and Their Association with Intimate Partner Homicide,” *American Journal of Epidemiology* 187, no. 11 (2018); Garen Wintemute, et al., “Extreme Risk Protection Orders Intended to Prevent Mass Shootings: A Case Series,” *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 171, no. 9 (2019); Michael C. Monuteaux, et al., “Association of Increased Safe Household Firearm Storage With Firearm Suicide and Unintentional Death Among US Youths,” *JAMA Pediatrics* 173, no. 7 (2019); P. Jeffrey Brantingham, et al., “The Impact of the GRYD Incident Response Program on Gang Retaliations: GRYD Research & Evaluation Brief No. 2,” Los Angeles Mayor’s Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) (2020).

- Uplifting holistic prevention and intervention-oriented efforts to address risk factors for gun violence.
- Uplifting effective community violence intervention initiatives & supporting efforts to sustain and scale their work.
- Uplifting the needs and voices of survivors of gun violence.



## INTRODUCTION

This report is the Office of Gun Violence Prevention's first data publication. It aims to:

1. Provide an overview of the most current public health and safety facts and statistics available to the public in order to document how different forms of gun violence impact people and communities across California;
2. To place our state's long-term reductions in gun violence and pandemic-era increases in context with national trends; and
3. To use this data to help understand and inform efforts to effectively and equitably promote safety for all.

Data and statistics are necessarily impersonal and abstract. They document the cumulative impact of many personal, individual experiences over time and across large populations. But gun violence is not impersonal or abstract. No person lives or dies as a data point. We hope this data provides a foundation for informed and effective action.

Much of this report presents OGVP's original analysis of data generated from interactive, web-based databases that are free and accessible to members of the public. These include:

- The California Department of Justice's [Open Justice Data Portal](#)
- The California Department of Public Health's (CDPH) [EpiCenter California Injury Data Online](#) data portal
- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) [WONDER](#) (Underlying and Multiple Cause of Death) and [WISQARS](#) (Fatal Injury Reports) databases
- The non-profit [Gun Violence Archive's](#) searchable database of gun violence incidents
- *The Trace's* interactive [Atlas of American Gun Violence](#)

In recent years, the CDC has generally not released state or national data regarding *nonfatal* firearm-related injuries, making CDPH's EpiCenter data portal a unique and vital source for information about nonfatal gun violence incidents resulting in hospitalization or emergency department care.

Both California and federal agencies typically process, release, and update public health- and safety-related data sets with standard time delays. For instance, the CDC released Provisional Mortality data for 2022 in May 2023 based on death records received and processed as of April 2, 2023. According to the CDC, this 2022 data likely includes >99% of deaths occurring in 2022 but may be subject to future adjustments to reflect additional death certificates for 2022 processed after April 2, 2023.<sup>3</sup> For some data sets used to prepare this report, 2021 is the most recent year for which data is available at the time of writing.

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3 The CDC released Provisional Mortality data for 2022 in May 2023 based on death records received and processed as of April 2, 2023. This 2022 data likely includes >99% of deaths occurring in 2022 but is provisional and may be subject to future adjustments to reflect additional death certificates for 2022 received, processed, and published after OGVP last accessed CDC data through the WONDER Database on August 10, 2023. See Farida B. Ahmad, et al., "Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Provisional Mortality Data — United States, 2022," US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (May 5, 2023), <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7218a3.htm>.



## DATA HIGHLIGHTS

### Comparing California to the Rest of the U.S.

- California used to have substantially higher gun death rates than the rest of the U.S. but has made substantial long-term progress in reducing rates of both firearm homicide and suicide. Thirty years ago, California's gun homicide rate was the third highest in the country and over 50% above the rest of the U.S., and California's gun suicide rate closely mirrored the rest of the nation.
- By 2022, California had the 7<sup>th</sup> lowest gun death rate in the country. Recently published data<sup>4</sup> from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that in 2022:
  - California's gun death rate<sup>5</sup> was 43% below the rate recorded for the rest of the U.S.
  - California's gun homicide rate was 33% below the rate recorded for the rest of the U.S.
  - For youth under 25, California's gun homicide rate was 45% below the rate recorded for the rest of the U.S.
  - California's firearm suicide rate was less than half the rate recorded for the rest of the U.S.
- In 2019, California had its lowest overall gun death rate on record in CDC data going back over half a century. Like the rest of the nation, California then experienced significant spikes in gun deaths in 2020 and 2021, especially gun homicides, which started rising in March 2020 alongside the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. After significant pandemic-era increases, California's gun homicide rate fell by 10% from 2021 to 2022.<sup>6</sup>
- Even after significant pandemic-era increases, California's gun homicide rate for youth under 25 was nearly 50% lower in 2022 than it was in 2006. In contrast, the rest of the U.S. experienced a 37% *increase* in youth gun homicide rates over the same period.
- If the firearm mortality rate in the rest of the U.S. matched California's from 2013-2022, there would have been nearly 140,000 fewer firearm-related deaths nationwide in that decade alone.

### Gunshot Wound Injuries in California

- From 2016-2021, there were 69,136 gunshot wound incidents in California that resulted in death or required urgent medical attention in the form of hospitalization or emergency department care:
  - 49% of these gunshot wound incidents were intentional firearm assaults or homicides.
  - 31% were unintentional shootings.

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4 Id.

5 Rates provided in this section are age-adjusted per capita rates, as reported by the CDC. Age-adjusted rates seek to control for the effects of age from crude rates so as to allow for meaningful comparisons across populations with different underlying age structures. See CDC, "Frequently Asked Questions: What exactly are age-adjusted rates?", <https://wonder.cdc.gov/wonder/help/faq.html#6>.

6 Id.



- o 15% were the result of intentional self-harm
  - o 2% were classified as the result of legal intervention or military operations.
  - o For 3% the intent was undetermined.
- Due to the unique lethality of intentional self-inflicted firearm injuries, suicides comprised a plurality of firearm-related deaths in California over this period. However, firearm assaults and unintentional shootings were much more common overall.
  - Gunshot injuries constituted less than 1% of intentional self-harm incidents requiring hospitalization or emergency department care in California, but constituted 38% of California’s suicide deaths.
  - From 2016-2021, there were 24,612 nonfatal gun assault shootings in California requiring hospitalization or emergency department care.
  - Survivors of gun assault shootings are at very elevated risk of violent reinjury and death: researchers found that compared to the statewide average, the gun homicide rate in California was at least 60 times higher for people who had previously survived a firearm assault shooting.

### **Crime Guns**

- In 2021, just over half (50.4%) of the firearms recovered by law enforcement investigations in California and successfully traced by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) to a final dealer of record were traced to dealers located in other states.
- In 2021, California was the source state for 2,036 ATF-traced firearms recovered by law enforcement in all other states and territories combined. Neighboring Arizona was the source state for 4,725 traced firearms recovered by law enforcement in California alone.
- The number of unserialized ghost guns<sup>7</sup> recovered as crime guns in California increased by 165% from 2020 to 2021 and then by 4% from 2021 to 2022. From 2021 to 2022, there was also a 7% decrease in the overall number of unserialized firearms recovered as crime guns in California, the first decline reported since 2013. In 2022, California enacted new legislation to comprehensively strengthen regulation of the ghost gun industry and most of these provisions took effect on June 30, 2022.
- In 2021, the number of domestic violence-related calls for assistance involving firearms in California reached the highest level reported since 1995.

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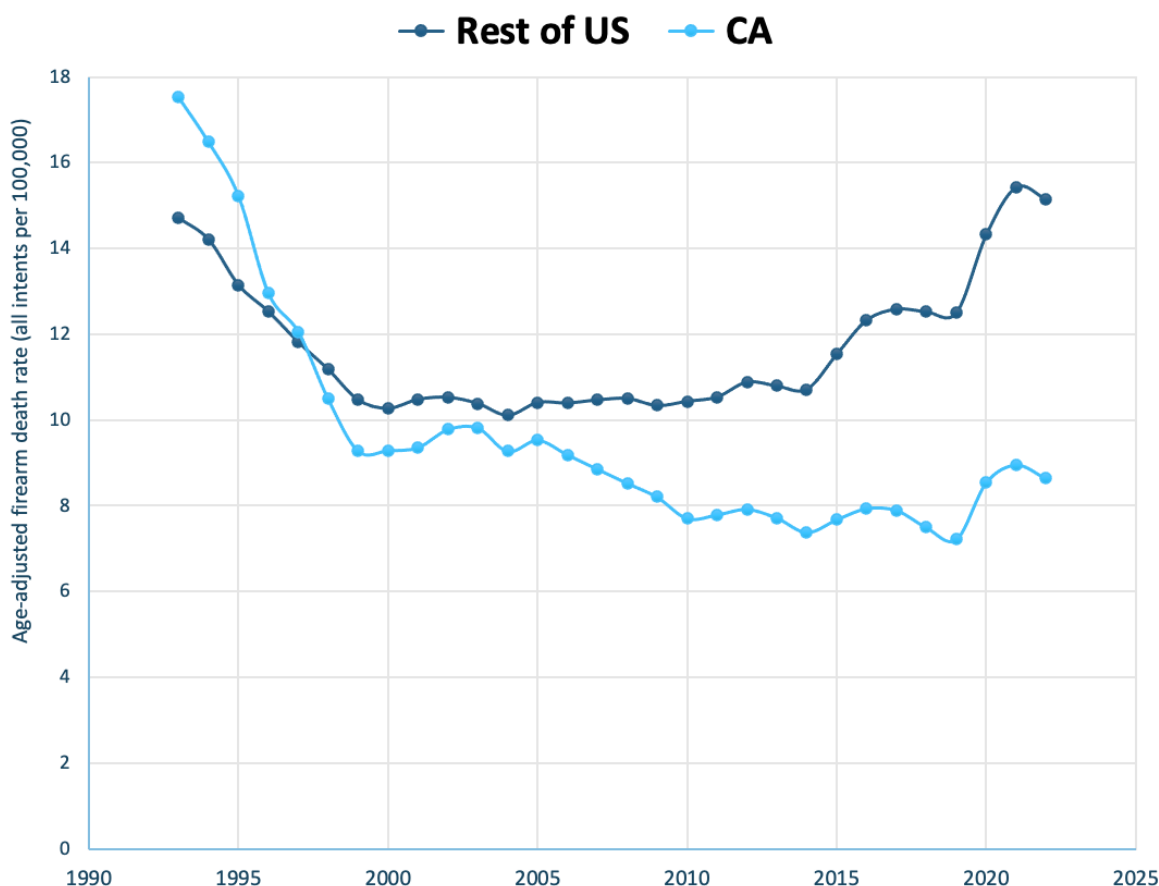
<sup>7</sup> “Ghost guns” are firearms manufactured or assembled by unlicensed individuals without a traceable serial number and are often assembled from gun build kits sold without background checks, sale records, or other safety precautions.





# DATA IN CONTEXT: COMPARING CALIFORNIA AND NATIONAL TRENDS

## Comparing California to the Rest of the U.S.: Overall Firearm-Related Mortality Rates



Compared to the rest of the nation (the other 49 states and D.C. combined), California has made substantial long-term progress in reducing per capita rates of firearm-related mortality over the last three decades.

Recently published CDC data for 2022 shows that California’s age-adjusted<sup>8</sup> per capita gun death rate (8.7 per 100,000) was just above half the rate recorded for the rest of the U.S. (15.2), and the seventh lowest out of all 50 states. That “rest of the U.S.” grouping includes multiple populous states with relatively low rates of gun-related mortality (including MA, NJ, and NY); excluding those states would show even larger disparities between California and most of the rest of the nation.

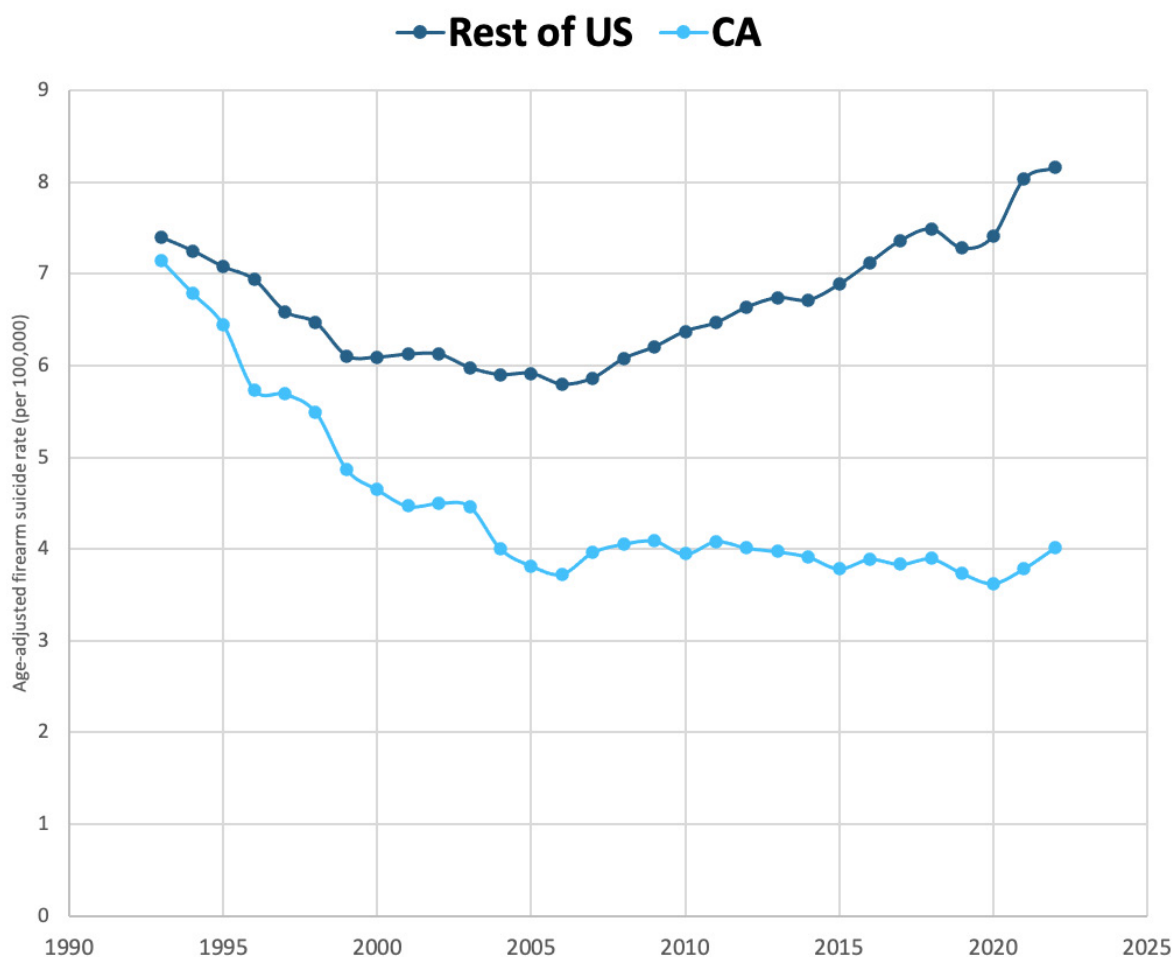
Before the pandemic, California’s reductions in gun deaths were record-setting: In 2019, California had its lowest overall firearm-related mortality rate on record in CDC data.<sup>9</sup>

*Source: OGVP analysis of data from CDC WONDER for 1993-2022 (2022 data provisional); Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. CDC records are available through WONDER going back to 1968; California’s firearm-related death rate was over one-third higher that year than in 2022.*

8 Age-adjusted rates seek to control for the effects of age from crude rates so as to allow meaningful comparisons across populations with different underlying age structures. See CDC, “Frequently Asked Questions: What exactly are age-adjusted rates?,” <https://wonder.cdc.gov/wonder/help/faq.html#6>.

9 OGVP analysis of data from CDC WONDER; Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. CDC records are available through the WONDER database going back to 1968, when California’s firearm-related death rate was 38% higher than in 2022 according to CDC data.

## Comparing California to the Rest of the U.S.: Firearm Suicide Rates



Compared to the rest of the nation (the other 49 states and D.C.), California has maintained much lower rates of firearm suicide. Recently published CDC data for 2022 show that California’s age-adjusted per capita firearm suicide rate (4.0 per 100,000) was less than half the rate recorded for the rest of the U.S. (8.2).

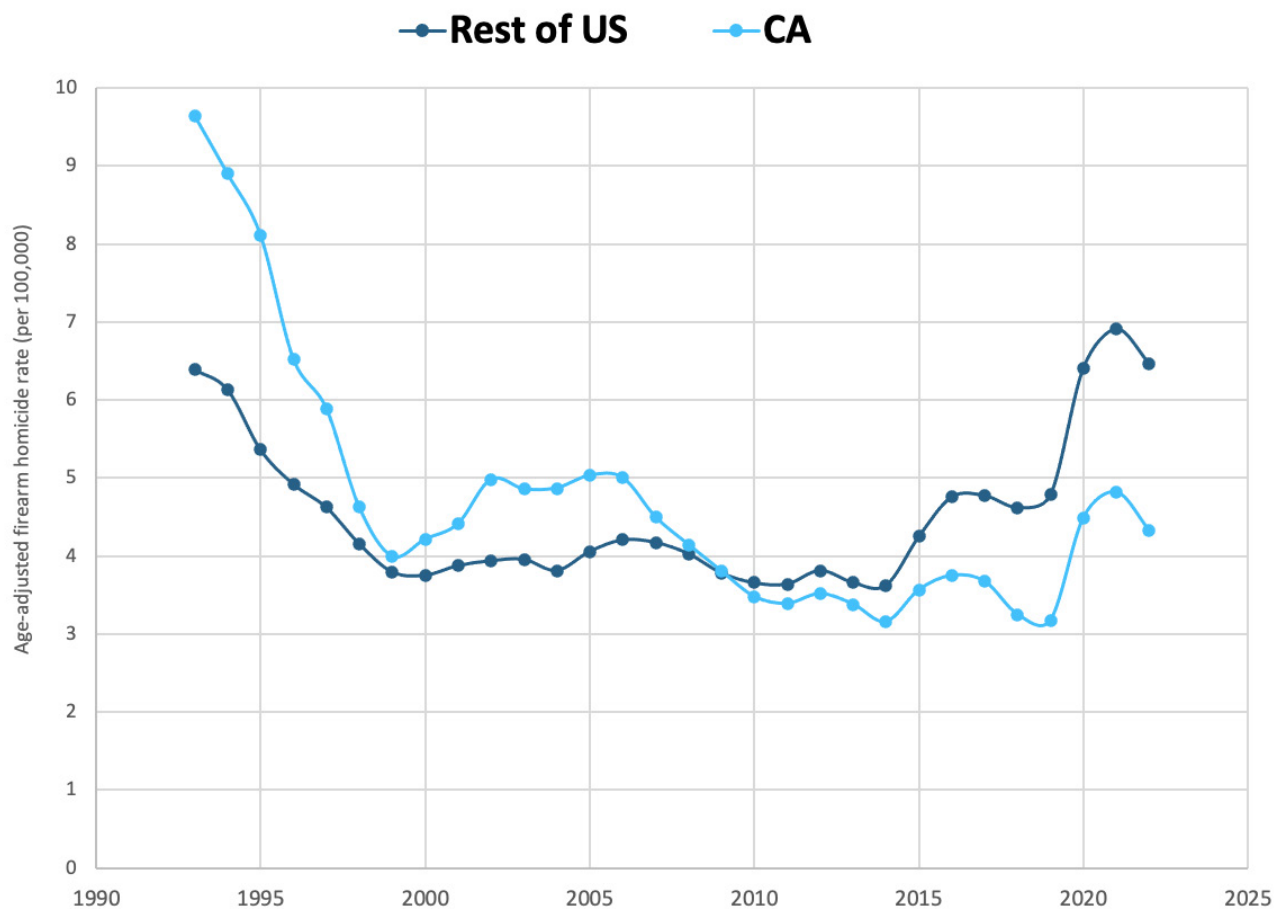
Firearm suicide rates in the rest of the U.S. increased by 41% from 2006-2022, after almost continuous increases year-over-year.

In 2020, California had its lowest firearm suicide rate on record, according to CDC data.<sup>10</sup> However, like the rest of the nation, California suffered increased firearm suicide rates in 2021 and 2022, and California’s firearm suicide rate was 8% higher in 2022 compared to 2006.

*Source: OGVP analysis of data from CDC WONDER for 1993-2022 (2022 data provisional); Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.*

<sup>10</sup> Based on OGVP analysis of age-adjusted firearm suicide data from CDC WONDER; Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. CDC records are available through the WONDER database going back to 1968.

## Comparing California to the Rest of the U.S.: Firearm Homicide Rates



Thirty years ago, California had the third highest firearm homicide rate of any state in the country. Compared to the rest of the nation (the other 49 states and D.C. combined), California has made substantial long-term progress in reducing per capita rates of firearm homicide, with substantial decreases through the 1990s, from 2006-2014, 2016-2019, and 2021-2022.

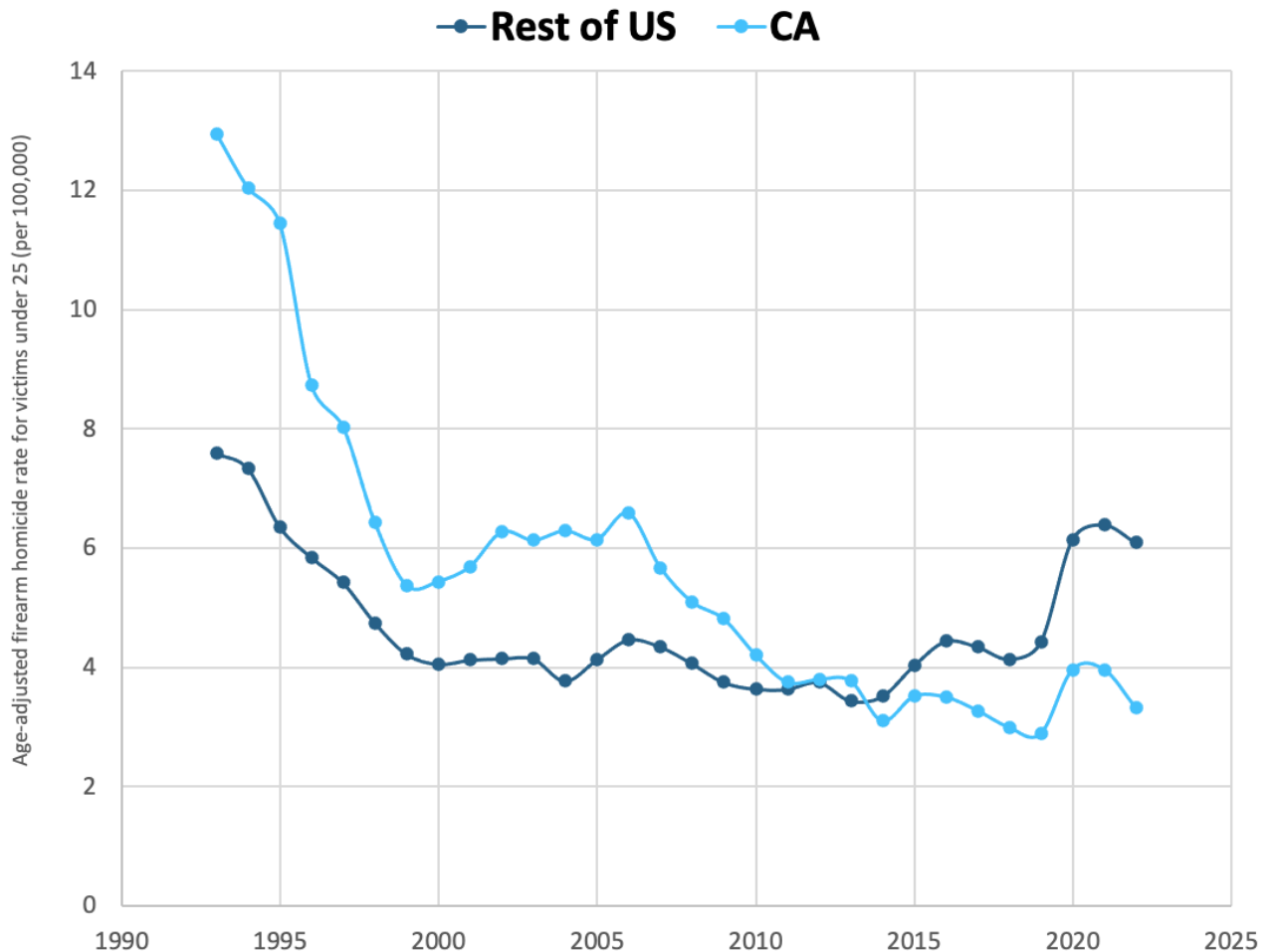
Recently published CDC data for 2022 show that California’s age-adjusted per capita firearm homicide rate (4.3 per 100,000) was 33% below the rate recorded for the rest of the U.S. (6.5).

In 2014 and 2019, California had its lowest and second-lowest firearm homicide rates on record in CDC data.<sup>11</sup> However, California and the rest of the nation suffered significant spikes in gun homicides during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021.

*Source: OGVP analysis of data from CDC WONDER for 1993-2022 (2022 data provisional); Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.*

<sup>11</sup> Based on OGVP analysis of age-adjusted firearm homicide data from CDC WONDER; Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. CDC records are available through the WONDER database going back to 1968.

## Comparing California to the Rest of the U.S.: Firearm Homicide Rates for Youth Under 25

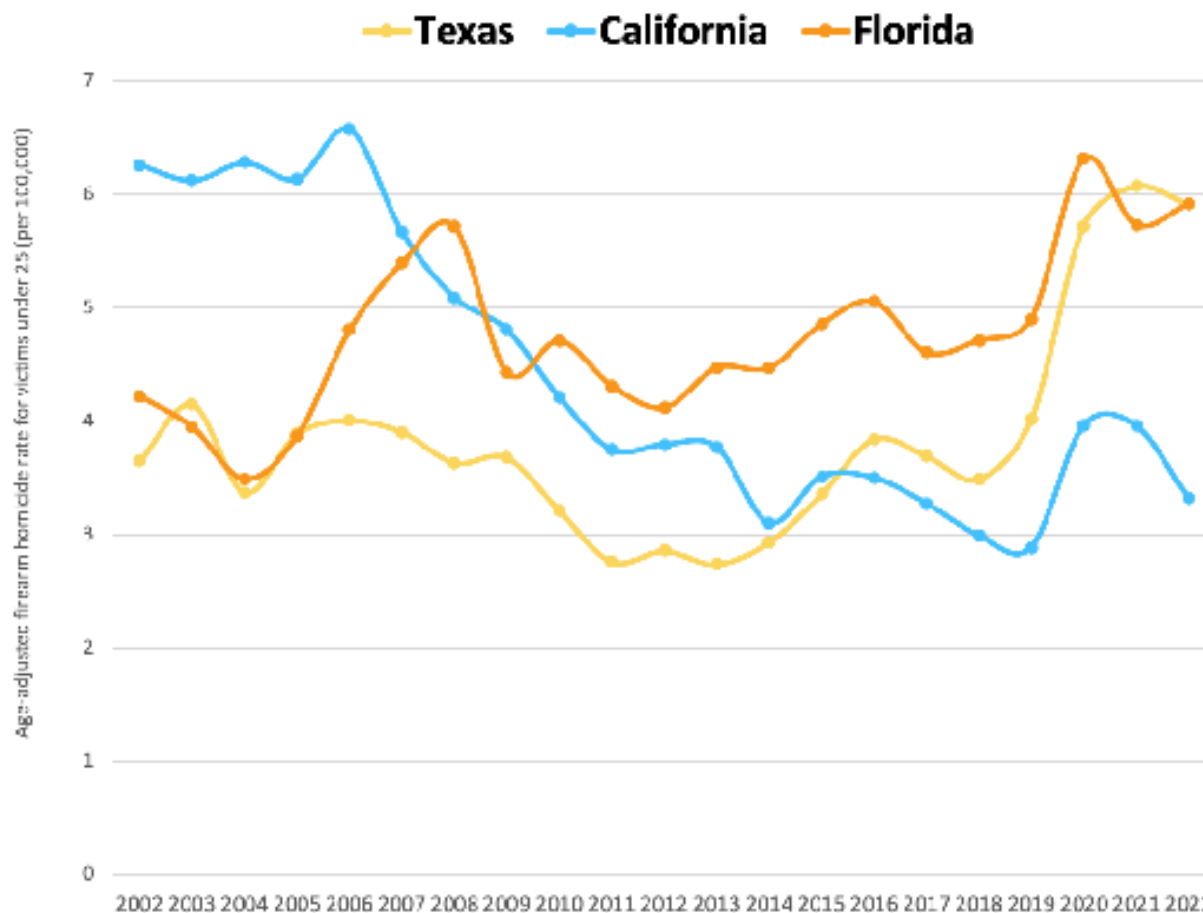


Thirty years ago, out of all 50 states, California had the third-highest rate of youth firearm homicides for victims under the age of 25. Compared to the rest of the nation (the other 49 states and D.C. combined), California has made substantial long-term progress in reducing per capita rates of youth firearm homicide. CDC data shows that in 2022, California’s age-adjusted per capita firearm homicide rate for youth under 25 (3.3 per 100,000) was 45% below the rate recorded for the rest of the U.S. (6.1).

Even after significant pandemic-era increases in homicides, California’s firearm homicide rate for youth was nearly 50% lower in 2022 compared to 2006; in the rest of the U.S., youth gun homicides increased over this same period by 37%.

*Source: OGVP analysis of data from CDC WONDER for 1993-2022 (2022 data provisional); Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.*

## Comparing the Nation's Most Populous States: Firearm Homicide Rates for Youth Under 25



California has made especially significant progress in reducing rates of youth gun homicide since 2006. Even after significant pandemic-era increases, California’s youth gun homicide rate in 2022 was nearly 50% lower than it was in 2006.

In contrast, the next two most populous states after California -- Florida and Texas -- experienced substantial *increases* over this same period, with youth homicide rates rising by 24% in Florida and 49% in Texas.

In 2022, California’s youth gun homicide rate (3.3 per 100,000) was just over half the rate recorded in both Florida (6.0) and Texas (6.0).

*Source: OGVP analysis of age-adjusted firearm homicide data from CDC WONDER for 2002-2022 (2022 data provisional).*

## **Impact in California**

**If California's firearm mortality rate matched the rest of the U.S., California would have lost nearly 19,000 more people to fatal firearm injuries in a single decade, from 2013-2022. Tens of thousands more people would likely have been shot in this state.**

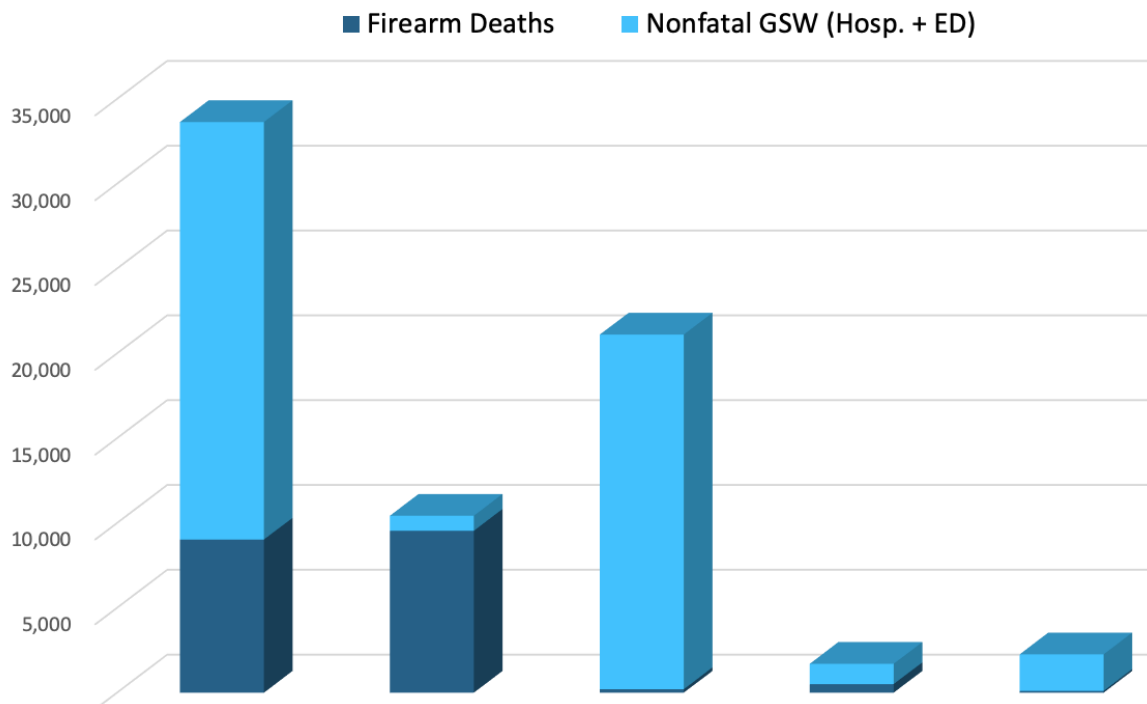
**If the firearm mortality rate in the rest of the U.S. matched California's over this same period, there would have been nearly 140,000 fewer firearm-related deaths across the nation in that decade alone, and potentially hundreds of thousands fewer gunshot injuries.**

*Source: OGVP analysis of data from CDC WONDER for 2013-2022. From 2013-2022, the crude (non-age-adjusted) per capita firearm death rate in California was 8.1 per 100,000; California suffered at least 31,923 firearm-related deaths. Over the same period, the crude per capita firearm death rate in the rest of the United States (the other 49 states and D.C. combined) was 13.0 per 100,000; the rest of the U.S. suffered at least 371,676 firearm-related deaths. If California had the same gun death rate as the rest of the U.S. over this period, it would have suffered an estimated 50,906 firearm deaths instead of 31,923. If the rest of the U.S. had the same gun death rate as California over this period, it would have suffered an estimated 233,079 firearm deaths instead of 371,676.*



# ANALYSIS OF GUN VIOLENCE INJURIES BY INTENT, LETHALITY, AND COUNTY IN CALIFORNIA

## Fatal & Nonfatal Gunshot Wound Injuries In California by Intent (2016-2021)



	Assault	Self-Harm	Uninten.	Legal	Undeterm.
Nonfatal GSW (Hosp. + ED)	24,612	884	20,904	1,195	2,152
Firearm Deaths	9,027	9,545	204	507	106
% Fatal	26.8%	91.5%	1.0%	29.8%	4.7%

From 2016-2021, there were 69,136 gunshot wound (GSW) incidents in California that resulted in death or required urgent medical attention in the form of hospitalization or emergency department care. Just under half (49%) of these incidents were intentional firearm assaults or homicides, 31% were unintentional shootings, 15% were the result of intentional self-harm, 2% were classified as the result of legal intervention or military operations, and for 3% the intent was undetermined. For every person killed from a gunshot wound in California over this period, between two and three others required urgent medical attention for gunshot wounds but survived, including victims of nearly 25,000 nonfatal firearm assault shootings.

Intentional, self-inflicted firearm injuries were much more likely to result in death than other firearm injuries on average. As a result, suicides represented a slight plurality of all fatal gunshot injuries in California over this period. However, firearm assaults and unintentional shootings were much more common overall.

Source: OGVP analysis of firearm death, hospitalization, and emergency dept. data from CDPH EpiCenter.



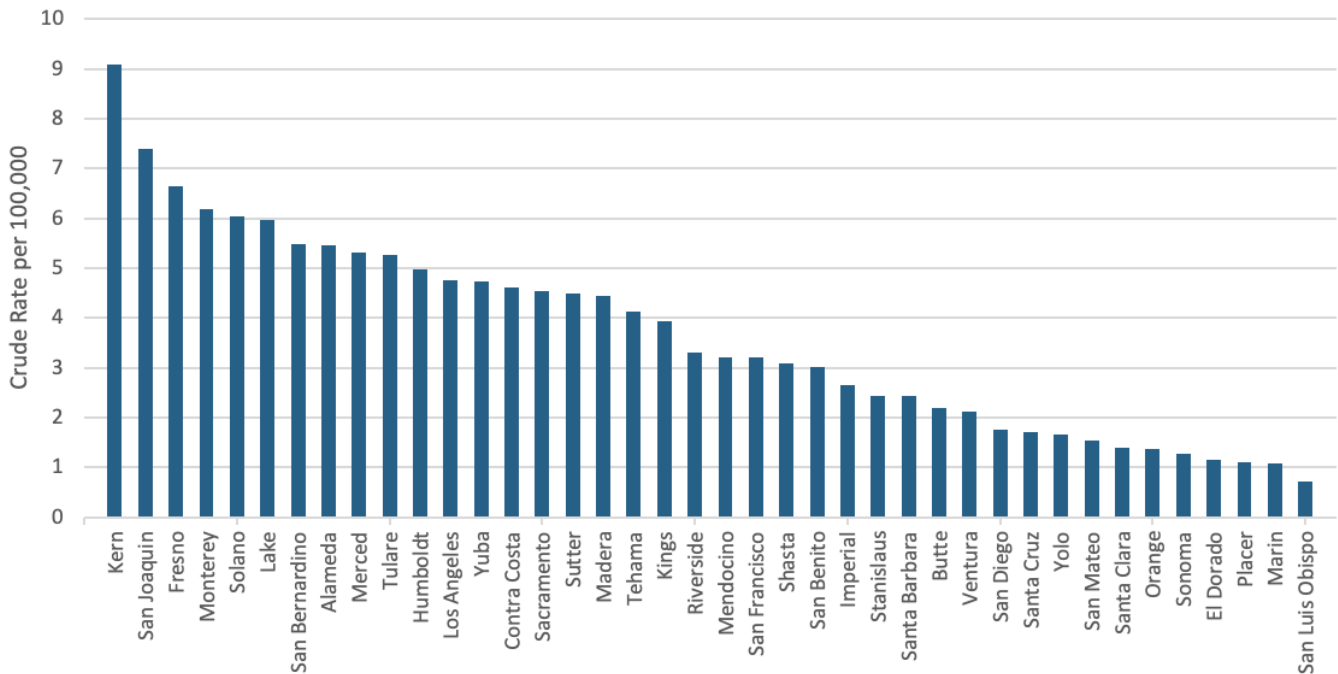
## Gun Homicide Rates by County in California (2016-2021):

California’s statewide firearm homicide rate from 2016-2021 was 3.8 per 100,000, 23% below the national average.<sup>12</sup> There are considerable disparities in gun homicide rates between different communities in California, both between and within counties, cities, and neighborhoods. For example, an analysis by Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence found that half of Los Angeles’ gun homicides in 2015 occurred in census tracts (roughly equivalent to neighborhoods) housing 3% of the city’s total population.<sup>13</sup>

At the county level, more populous counties tend to have higher numbers of gun homicides overall. This is especially true for Los Angeles County, which contains about 25% of California’s total population<sup>14</sup> and suffered 32% of all gun homicides in California from 2016-2021.<sup>15</sup>

On a per capita basis, however, some counties in the Central Valley and Central Coastal region have much higher gun homicide rates. According to data from the California Department of Public Health, Kern County’s gun homicide rate (9.1 per 100,000), was the highest in the state and more than double California’s statewide average from 2016-2021.<sup>16</sup> The five counties with the highest gun homicide rates in California over this period were (1) Kern (9.1 per 100,000), (2) San Joaquin (7.4), (3) Fresno (6.6), (4) Monterey (6.2), and (5) Solano (6.0).<sup>17</sup> (CDPH does not release this data for counties with fewer than 11 total gun homicide deaths over this period, and those counties are excluded from the graph below).

**Gun Homicide Rates by County**



Source: Based on data from CDPH EpiCenter showing crude firearm homicide incident rates per 100,000 for 2016-2021 by county of residence, as reported by the California Department of Public Health.

12 Based on OGVP analysis of crude (non-age-adjusted) firearm homicide data from CDC WISQARS for 2016-2021.  
 13 See Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, “In Pursuit of Peace: Building Police-Community Trust to Break the Cycle of Violence” (Sep. 9, 2021), <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/report/in-pursuit-of-peace-building-police-community-trust-to-break-the-cycle-of-violence>.  
 14 See U.S. Census Bureau, “Quick Facts, Los Angeles County, California,” Population estimates for July 1, 2022.  
 15 Based on OGVP analysis of data from CDPH EpiCenter, crude (non-age-adjusted) firearm homicide rate by county for 2016-2021.  
 16 Id.  
 17 Id.

## Gun Suicide Rates by County in California (2016-2021):

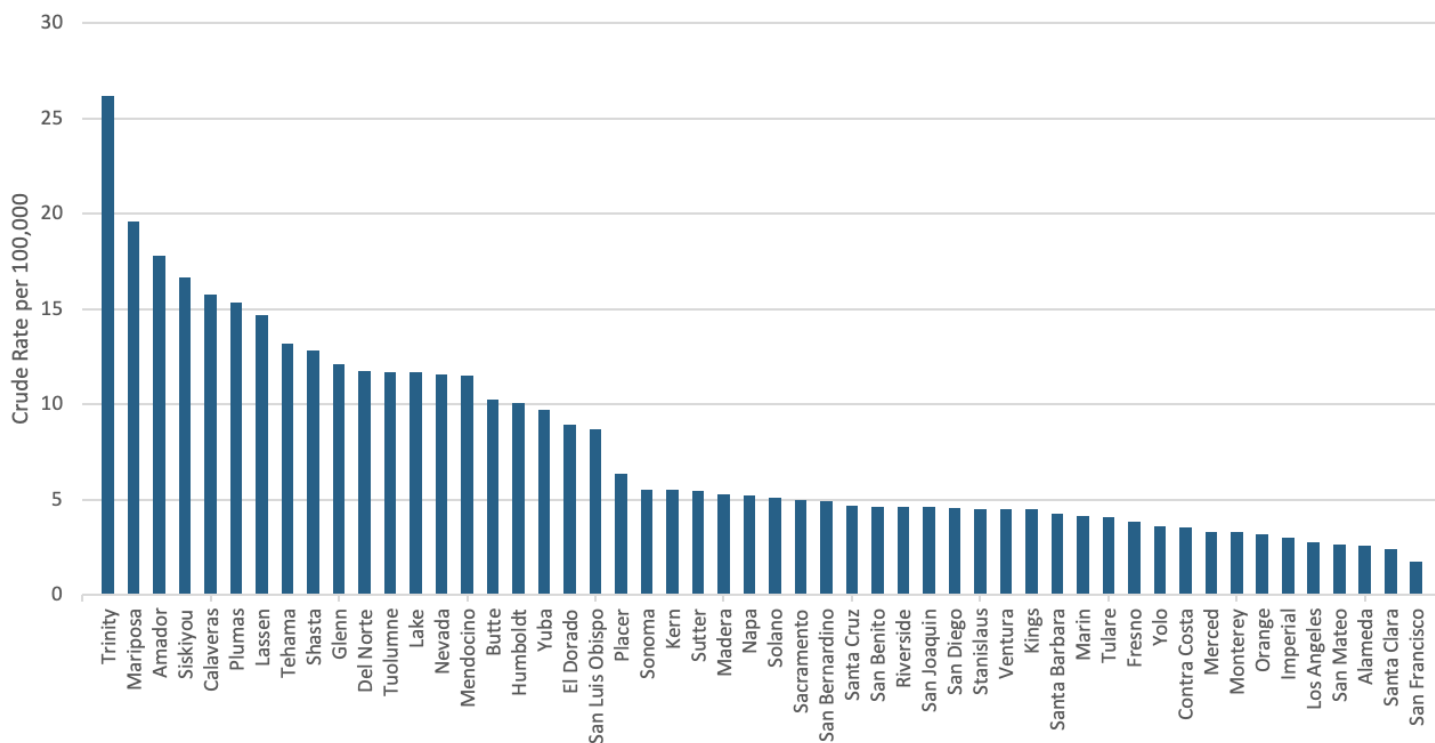
California’s statewide firearm suicide rate from 2016-2021 was 4.0 per 100,000, 45% below the national average.<sup>18</sup>

There are very large disparities in firearm suicide rates between different communities in California.

At the county level, more populous counties tend to have higher numbers of gun suicide deaths. Though Los Angeles County has some of the lowest per capita rates of gun suicide in California (2.8 per 100,000), it had the largest number of gun suicide deaths overall.<sup>19</sup> Los Angeles County contains about 25% of California’s total population<sup>20</sup> and suffered 18% of all gun suicides in California from 2016-2021.

On a per capita basis, however, many more rural counties have significantly higher gun suicide rates. Ten counties in California had gun suicide rates that were more than *triple* the statewide average from 2016-2021, including Trinity (26.2 per 100,000), Mariposa (19.6), Amador (17.8), Siskiyou (16.7), Calaveras (15.7), Plumas (15.3), Lassen (14.7), Tehama (13.2), Shasta (12.9), and Glenn (12.1).<sup>21</sup> (CDPH does not release this data for counties with fewer than 11 total gun suicide deaths over this period, and those counties are excluded from the graph below).

Gun Suicide Rates by County



Source: Based on data from CDPH EpiCenter showing crude (non-age-adjusted) firearm suicide incident rates per 100,000 for 2016-2021 by county of residence, as reported by the California Department of Public Health.

18 Based on OGVP analysis of crude (non-age-adjusted) firearm suicide data from CDC WISQARS for 2016-2021.

19 Based on OGVP analysis of crude (non-age-adjusted) firearm suicide data from CDPH EpiCenter for 2016-2021.

20 See U.S. Census Bureau, “Quick Facts, Los Angeles County, California,” Population estimates for July 1, 2022.

21 Based on OGVP analysis of crude (non-age-adjusted) firearm suicide data from CDPH EpiCenter for 2016-2021.



# ANALYSIS OF GUN VIOLENCE FACTORS, DISPARITIES, AND RECENT CHALLENGES IN CALIFORNIA

## *Crime Guns<sup>22</sup> Trafficked into California:*

A significant percentage of firearms recovered by law enforcement in California in connection with suspected criminal activity are traced back to sellers in other states, especially states that have enacted fewer gun safety regulations and safeguards, such as background check requirements.

In 2021, the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) reported that it received law enforcement requests to investigate (or “trace”) the sale history of 54,338 firearms that were recovered by law enforcement authorities in California that year. ATF was able to successfully trace the source of 31,609 (58%) of those firearms by identifying the purchaser and final dealer of record. (A significant portion of the remaining untraced firearms may have been untraceable because they were unserialized, privately manufactured ghost guns that typically would not have an associated record of sale through a federally licensed firearms dealer).

**OGVP’s analysis of this published ATF data found that, in 2021, just over half (50.4%) of the firearms recovered by law enforcement in California and successfully traced to a final dealer of record were traced to dealers located in other states.** Only six other states traced a higher percentage of firearms recovered by law enforcement to out-of-state sources.<sup>23</sup> In comparison, less than 16% of guns recovered by law enforcement in neighboring Arizona were traced to dealers outside Arizona.<sup>24</sup> A majority of the California-recovered firearms traced to out-of-state sources were traced to dealers in three states: Arizona (30%), Nevada (14%), and Texas (10%).

Only three states (New Jersey, New York, and Maryland) recovered a larger number of firearms traced to sellers in California compared to the number of firearms California recovered and traced to sellers in those states. The remaining 46 states were net exporters of suspected crime guns to California, often by a very substantial margin.

For instance, ATF firearm tracing data show that in 2021, California was the source state for 2,036 (0.59%) of the nearly 344,000 traced firearms recovered by law enforcement in *all other states and*

22 California law generally requires state and local law enforcement agencies to report to the California Department of Justice “all information necessary to identify and trace the history” of firearms recovered by a law enforcement agency after the firearm was (1) used in a crime, (2) suspected to have been used in a crime, or (3) illegally possessed; these firearms recovered by law enforcement are generally referred to as “crime guns”. At the federal level, ATF authorizes law enforcement agencies to submit a trace request to assist in conducting law enforcement investigations by tracking the sale and possession of specific firearms. These resources are generally focused on tracing firearms recovered by law enforcement in connection with a bona fide criminal investigation if such firearms were possessed, used, or intended to be used, during or in relation to a crime; ATF’s Firearms Trace Data Disclaimer also cautions, however, that “Law enforcement agencies may request firearms traces for any investigative reason, and those reasons are not necessarily reported to the federal government. Not all firearms used in crime are traced and not all firearms traced are used in crime.” See ATF, “Fact Sheet – National Tracing Center ATF” (Apr. 2023), at <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/fact-sheet/fact-sheet-national-tracing-center>, and “Firearms Trace Data: California – 2021”, ATF Firearms Trace Data Disclaimer, at <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/firearms-trace-data-california-2021>.

23 Based on OGVP analysis of data from ATF, “Firearms Trace Data: California – 2021”, at <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/firearms-trace-data-california-2021> and “Number of Firearms Sourced and Recovered in the United States and Territories,” at <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/firearms-trace-data-2021>. Those six other states are New York (85% of recovered firearms traced to out-of-state sources), New Jersey (84%), Hawaii (79%), Massachusetts (69%), Connecticut (57%), Maryland (56%), and Illinois (53%).

24 Based on OGVP analysis of data from ATF, “Firearms Trace Data: California – 2021”, available at <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/firearms-trace-data-california-2021> and “Number of Firearms Sourced and Recovered in the United States and Territories,” available at <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/firearms-trace-data-2021>.

*territories combined*, including 203 firearms recovered by law enforcement in Arizona. By comparison, in the same year, Arizona was the source state for 4,725 firearms recovered by law enforcement *just in California alone*. ATF traced over 23 times as many firearms flowing from Arizona dealers to law enforcement investigations in California as ATF traced flowing in the opposite direction.

Not all firearms submitted by law enforcement for ATF tracing investigations were necessarily used in crime, and not all crime guns are submitted to ATF for tracing. Nonetheless, this data reinforces other research findings that a disproportionate share of guns used in crime in California are trafficked into California after they are acquired from sellers in other states with fewer firearm regulations and safeguards.<sup>25</sup> For more analysis and data regarding crime guns traced to dealers in California, see DOJ's annual [Crime Guns in California report](#).<sup>26</sup>

*Source: OGVP analysis of data from ATF, "Firearms Trace Data: California – 2021", available at <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/firearms-trace-data-california-2021> and "Number of Firearms Sourced and Recovered in the United States and Territories," available at <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/firearms-trace-data-2021>. See also, ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA): Crime Guns – Volume Two, Part III, Crime Guns Recovered and Traced within the United States and its Territories" (Jan. 11, 2023), at <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-ii-part-iii-crime-guns-recovered-and-traced-us/download>.*

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25 See, e.g., Everytown for Gun Safety, "Everytown Analysis: ATF Data Shows Increases in Key Indicators of Gun Trafficking During 2020" (Dec. 20, 2021) (finding that in 2020, California was, by far, the leading destination state for trafficked guns that moved across state lines and were used in a crime within three years from the time of purchase and that Arizona was the second leading source state for such trafficked guns); Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, "Annual Gun Law Scorecard," <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/resources/scorecard/> (ranking the strength of each state's gun safety laws; in 2023, CA received an A grade and Arizona received an F).

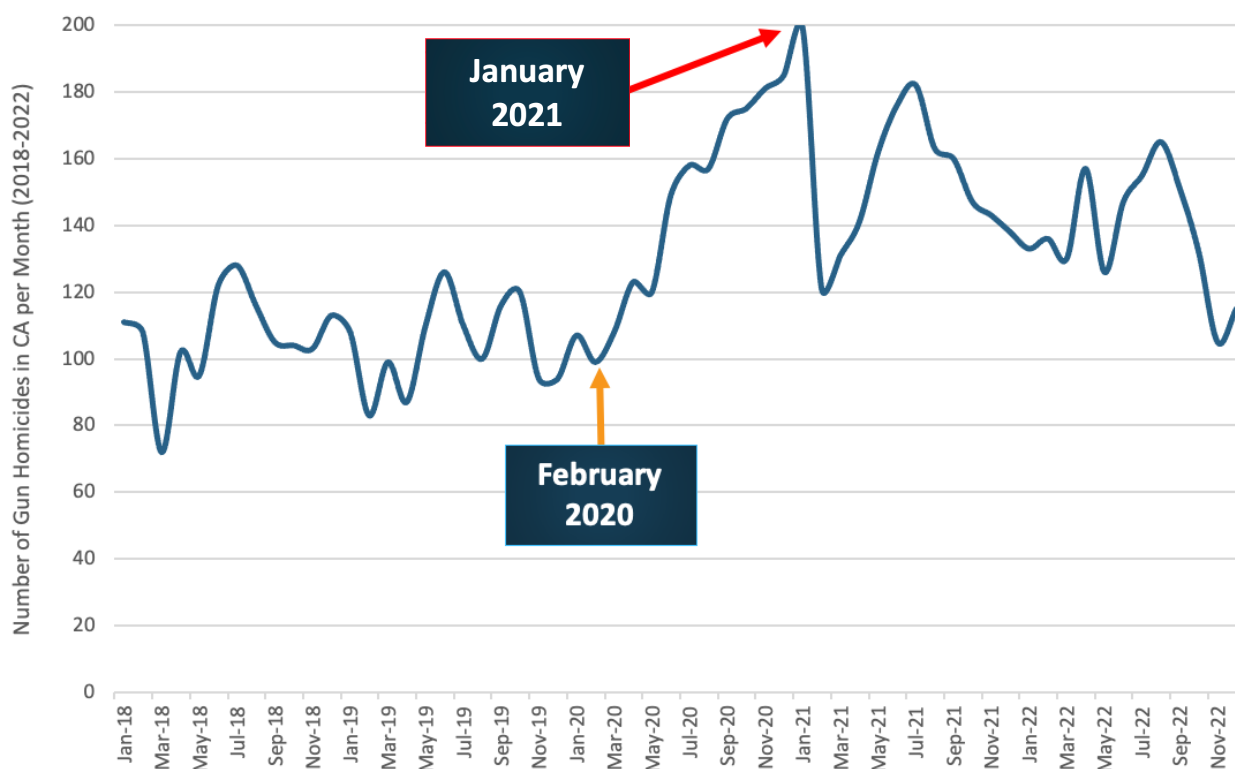
26 California DOJ, "Crime Guns in California, Mandated Reporting Statistics, AB 1191 Legislative Report" (Jun. 30, 2023), <https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/attachments/press-docs/AB%201191%20Crime%20Gun%20Report.pdf>.

## Pandemic-Era Spikes in Gun Homicide:

In 2020, the U.S. suffered the largest single-year spike in homicides on record, driven by a 35% increase in the nation’s gun homicide rate from 2019 to 2020.<sup>27</sup> Gun homicide rates continued to climb by another 8% in the U.S. from 2020 to 2021.<sup>28</sup> At the national level, these record spikes in gun violence occurred after the U.S. had already experienced a 30% increase in gun homicide rates from 2014-2019; by 2021, Americans were nearly twice as likely to be murdered with a gun compared to one decade before.<sup>29</sup>

California achieved near-record low gun homicide rates in 2019 but, like the rest of the nation, experienced substantial increases in gun violence in 2020 and 2021. In California, this spike in gun homicides began in March 2020 and then continued to climb month-over-month almost continuously to a peak in January 2021. California suffered 99 gun homicides in February 2020 but 199 in January 2021.<sup>30</sup>

### Gun Homicides in California by Month



Source: OGVP analysis of data from CDPH for 2018-2022 on total number of firearm homicides by month in California (2022 data provisional); Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

27 See Associated Press, “FBI: 2020 homicides up nearly 30%, largest 1-year jump ever” (Sep. 27, 2021), <https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-crime-homicide-violent-crime-132443b2bc09707394698e6a90d3f388>; Center for American Progress, “The Recent Rise in Violent Crime Is Driven by Gun Violence” (Jun. 3, 2022), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-recent-rise-in-violent-crime-is-driven-by-gun-violence/>.

28 OGVP analysis of data from CDC WONDER; Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

29 Id. Data from data from CDC WONDER shows that from 2014 to 2019, the age-adjusted firearm homicide rate in the U.S. increased by 30% from 3.53 per 100,000 to 4.59. From 2011 to 2021, the age-adjusted firearm homicide rate in the U.S. increased 85% from 3.70 per 100,000 to 6.66.

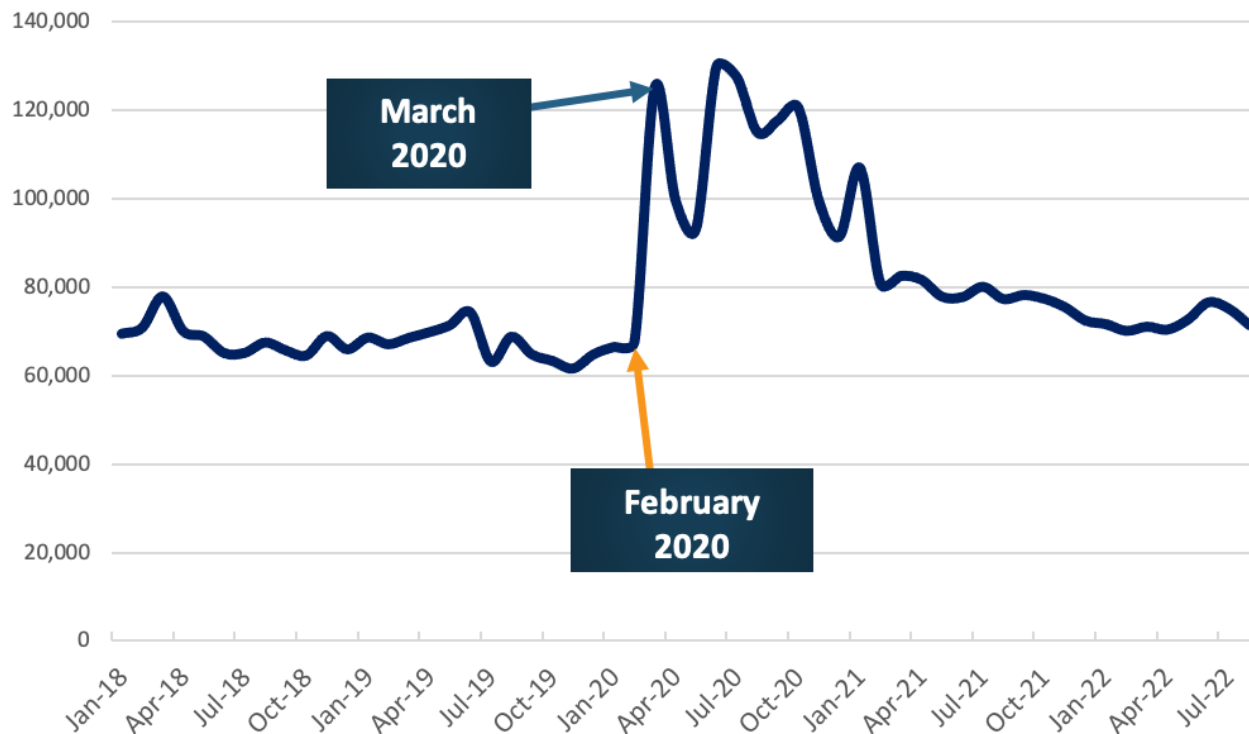
30 Based on OGVP analysis of data on the number of firearm homicides by month from CDPH for 2018-2022 (2022 data provisional).

## Pandemic-Era Spikes in Gun Sales:

At the national level, gun sales reached record levels in 2020, according to both firearm industry reports and analysis of FBI background checks data.<sup>31</sup> This nationwide surge in gun sales began in March 2020: The FBI reported a 33% increase in firearm-related National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) background check requests from February to March of 2020.<sup>32</sup> March 2020 saw more NICS background check requests than any other March on record and April saw more NICS background check requests than any other April on record. The same was true for every month that followed through May 2021.<sup>33</sup>

Beginning in March 2020, there was a similarly large and abrupt surge in firearm sales in California. Data analysis from *The Trace* indicates that Californians legally acquired about 800,000 firearms in 2019 and over 1.25 million in 2020, a 56% increase.<sup>34</sup> These estimates are based on the number of transactions that were legally recorded through licensed dealers: they would not include firearms acquired in California through other channels, including ghost guns.

### Firearms Lawfully Sold in California by Month Time-Adjusted Estimates from *The Trace*



Source: OGVP analysis of NICS background check records data reported by the FBI, "NICS Firearm Checks: Month/Year", [https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/nics\\_firearm\\_checks\\_-\\_month\\_year.pdf/view](https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/nics_firearm_checks_-_month_year.pdf/view), and time-adjusted firearm sale estimates conducted by *The Trace* based on NICS background check records data, <https://www.thetrace.org/2020/08/gun-sales-estimates/>.

31 See FBI, "NICS Firearm Checks: Month/Year", [https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/nics\\_firearm\\_checks\\_-\\_month\\_year.pdf/view](https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/nics_firearm_checks_-_month_year.pdf/view); Martin Savide and Maria Cartaya, "Americans bought guns in record numbers in 2020 during a year of unrest – and the surge is continuing," CNN (Mar. 14, 2021), <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/14/us/us-gun-sales-record/index.html>.

32 Based on OGVP analysis of FBI firearm background checks data reports: "NICS Firearm Checks: Month/Year", [https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/nics\\_firearm\\_checks\\_-\\_month\\_year.pdf/view](https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/nics_firearm_checks_-_month_year.pdf/view).

33 Id.

34 See Daniel Nass and Champe Barton, *The Trace*, "How Many Guns Did Americans Buy Last Month?" (Updated Jul. 12, 2023), <https://www.thetrace.org/2020/08/gun-sales-estimates/>.



## Ghost Guns in Crime:

In 2013, a gunman murdered five people in Santa Monica, California with an assault rifle he reportedly assembled from gun parts purchased online.<sup>35</sup> According to news reports at the time, he failed a background check to purchase a firearm from a licensed dealer in California but was likely never asked to pass one to purchase the key components he used to assemble his untraceable assault weapon.<sup>36</sup>

In the decade since that tragedy, unserialized ghost guns—typically assembled from gun build kits sold without background checks, sale records, or other safety precautions—proliferated at an alarming rate in shootings and other crime scenes across California and the U.S.

In 2015, law enforcement agencies in California reported recovering 26 ghost guns in connection with suspected criminal activity. That number rose to 167 in 2016, the year a U.S. Government Accountability Office report to Congress warned of “an emerging reliance by criminal organizations on this source of weapons.”<sup>37</sup> By 2021, the number of ghost guns recovered in connection with criminal activity in California grew to 12,388.<sup>38</sup>

Much of this increase occurred in 2020 and 2021. San Francisco’s Police Chief reported that ghost guns comprised 6% of firearms recovered in San Francisco homicide cases in 2019 but 44% in 2020.<sup>39</sup> Similar increases were reported across the state.

In recent years, California public officials have acted to address this growing public safety threat, through enforcement actions, affirmative litigation, and legislation. From 2021-2022, DOJ enforcement teams conducting Armed and Prohibited Persons System (APPS) investigations<sup>40</sup> recovered at least 93 ghost guns from people who were legally prohibited from possessing firearms in California.<sup>41</sup> In 2021, the California Department of Justice, San Francisco District Attorney’s Office, Los Angeles City Attorney’s Office, violence prevention groups, and victims of ghost gun shootings filed a series of lawsuits against ghost gun kit manufacturers and retailers for violating state and federal gun safety and consumer protection laws.<sup>42</sup> In 2022, California also enacted new legislation to comprehensively strengthen regulations and oversight of the ghost gun industry. Many of these new provisions took effect immediately when AB 1621 was signed into law on June 30, 2022.

There are some early positive indications that these and other efforts may have begun to slow the proliferation of ghost guns in crimes in California. As the graphs on the next page show, the number of suspected ghost guns recovered as crime guns in California increased by 165% from 2020 to 2021 and then by 4% from 2021 to 2022. From 2021 to 2022, there was also a 7% *decrease* in the overall number of unserialized firearms recovered as crime guns in California, the first decline reported since 2013.<sup>43</sup>

35 See Carter Evans, “Santa Monica shooter built his own weapon,” CBS News (Jun. 14, 2013), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/santa-monica-shooter-built-his-own-weapon/>.

36 See id.

37 U.S. GAO Report to Congress, “Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Combat Firearms Trafficking to Mexico

38 See California DOJ, “Armed and Prohibited Persons System Report 2022,” p. 24, <https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/media/2022-apps-report.pdf>.

39 See Megan Cassidy, “S.F. Supervisor Looks to Ban Untraceable ‘Ghost Guns,’” San Francisco

40 For more information about the Armed and Prohibited Persons System and enforcement teams, see California DOJ, “Armed and Prohibited Persons System Report 2022,” <https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/media/2022-apps-report.pdf>.

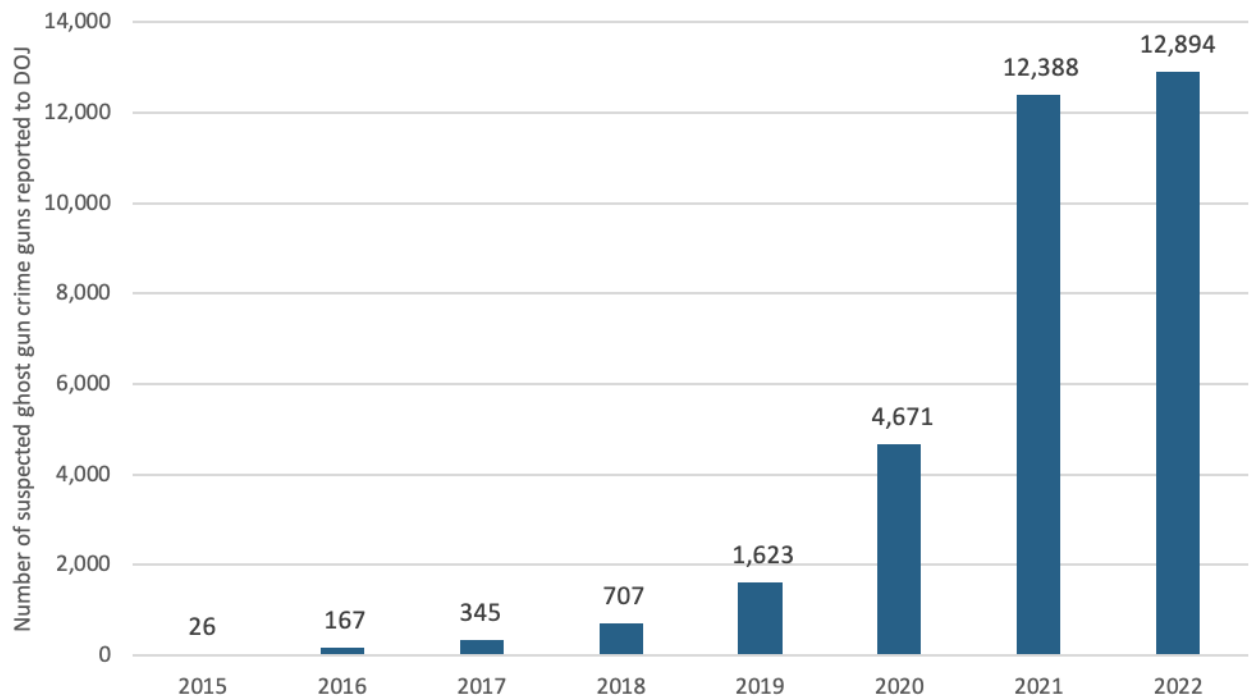
41 See California DOJ, “Armed and Prohibited Persons System Report 2022,” p. 24, <https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/media/2022-apps-report.pdf>.

42 See *People v. Blackhawk Manufacturing Group, Inc., et al.*, Case No. CGC-21-594577 (San Francisco Superior Court); *People v. Polymer80, inc.*, Case No. 21STCV06257 (Los Angeles Superior Court); *Tretta, et al. v. Osman, et al.*, Case No. 20STCV48910 (Los Angeles Superior Court); *Apolinar, et al., v. Polymer80, inc.*, Case No. 21STCV29196; *O’Sullivan v. Ghost Gunner, Inc.*, Case No. 34-2021-00302934 (Sacramento Superior Court).

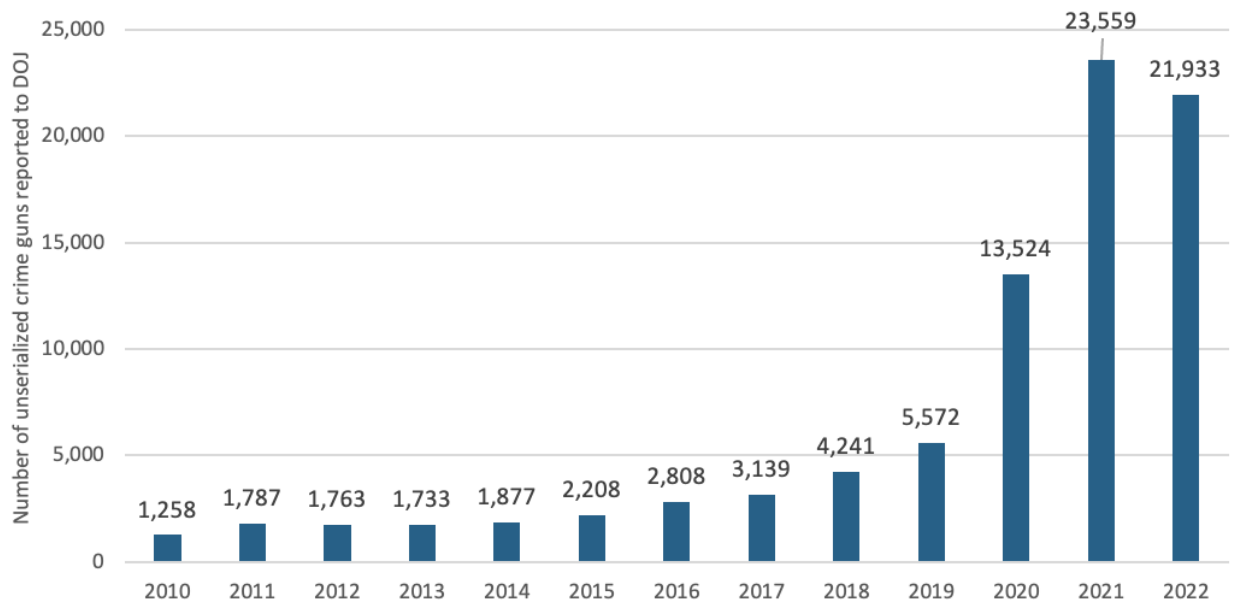
43 The broader number of unserialized firearms may include firearms with defaced or obliterated serial numbers, antique firearms, suspected ghost guns, and others missing serial number information.



## Number of Ghost Guns Recovered as Crime Guns in CA by Year



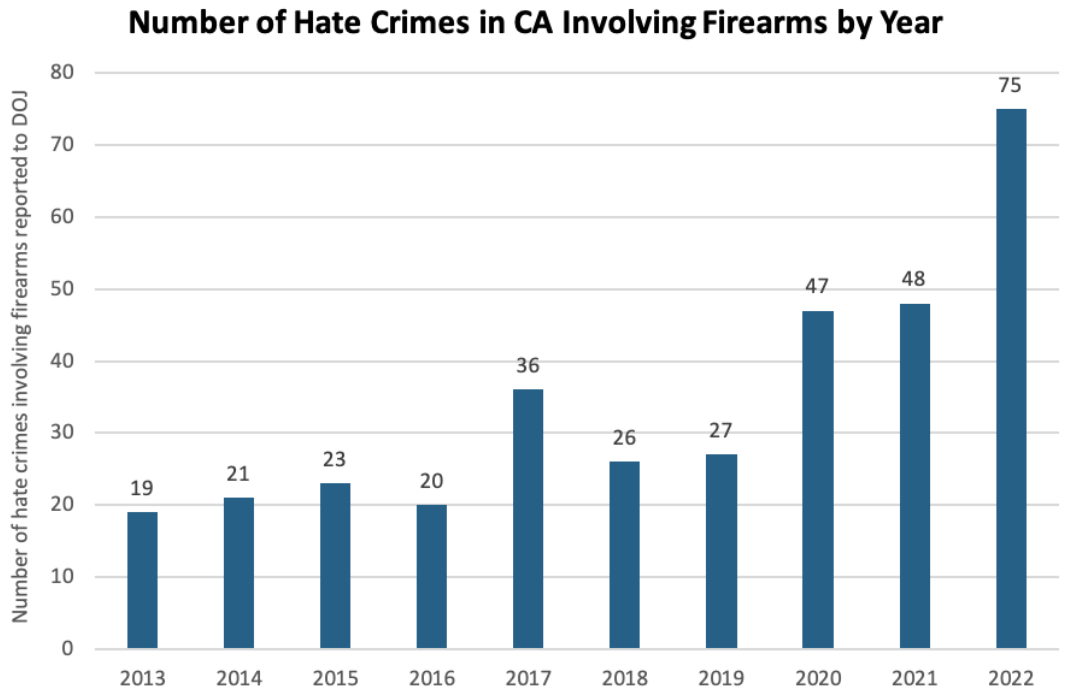
## Number of Firearms Without Serial Numbers Recovered as Crime Guns in CA by Year (Incl. suspected ghost guns, obliterated serial numbers, antiques)



Source: California Department of Justice, “Armed and Prohibited Persons System Report 2022,” P. 25, <https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/media/2022-apps-report.pdf>; Office of the Attorney General Rob Bonta, “Notice of Proposed Rulemaking: “Definition of ‘Frame or Receiver’ and Identification of Firearms,” Page 4 (Aug. 19, 2021), at [https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/attachments/press-docs/2021.08.18%20ATF%20Regulations%20Comment%20Letter%5B2%5D\\_0.pdf](https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/attachments/press-docs/2021.08.18%20ATF%20Regulations%20Comment%20Letter%5B2%5D_0.pdf); California Department of Justice, “Crime Guns in California, AB 1191 Legislative Report,” P. 9 (Jun. 30, 2023), <https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/attachments/press-docs/AB%201191%20Crime%20Gun%20Report.pdf>.

## Hate Crimes & Firearms:

Since 2019, California experienced a significant increase in reported hate crime incidents involving firearms.<sup>44</sup> From 2020-2022, the vast majority of those hate crime incidents with firearms—98%—were classified as violent crimes.<sup>45</sup>



Unlike a majority of U.S. states, California law generally disqualifies people convicted of misdemeanor assault, criminal threats, or hate crimes from accessing firearms for at least 10 years after conviction.<sup>46</sup>

California also provides options for people who have experienced violence, threats, stalking, abuse, or severe harassment to obtain civil restraining orders, such as the Civil Harassment Restraining Order (CHRO), that can promote their safety. Under California law, the Civil Harassment Restraining Order requires the respondent to stay-away from and not contact the protected party *and* legally prohibits the respondent from acquiring or possessing firearms and ammunition as long as the restraining order is in effect. For more information about these and other court ordered-firearm restrictions, see the [California Courts Self-Help Guide to Civil Harassment Restraining Orders in California](https://selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/CH-restraining-order).<sup>47</sup>

*Data Source: OGVP analysis of CA DOJ Hate Crimes data through OpenJustice Data Portal.*

<sup>44</sup> Based on OGVP analysis of CA DOJ Hate Crimes data accessed through DOJ’s OpenJustice Data Portal.

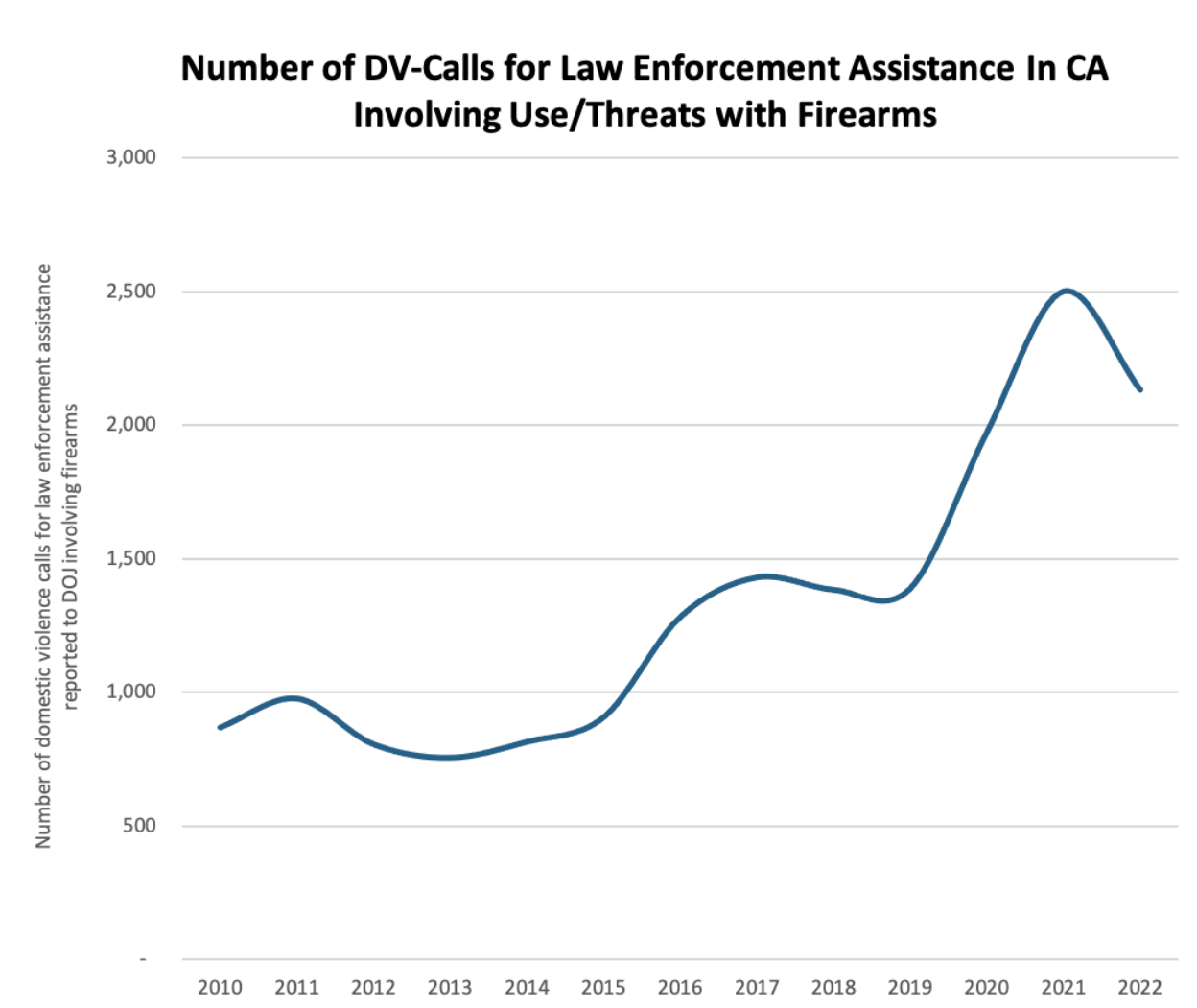
<sup>45</sup> Id. From 2020-2022, law enforcement agencies in California reported 170 hate crime incidents involving firearms, including 167 classified as violent crimes and 3 classified as property crimes.

<sup>46</sup> See Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, “How America’s Gun Laws Fuel Armed Hate” (May 23, 2022), <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/report/how-americas-gun-laws-fuel-armed-hate/>; See 2017 CA AB 785, amending Cal. Penal Code § 29805.

<sup>47</sup> California Courts Self-Help Guide to Civil Harassment Restraining Orders in California, <https://selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/CH-restraining-order>.

## Domestic Violence & Firearms:

In 2020 and 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, California experienced a significant increase in domestic violence incidents involving the use or threatened use of firearms. According to data reported to DOJ by law enforcement agencies, there was a 2% increase from 2019 to 2021 in the *overall number* of domestic violence-related calls requesting law enforcement assistance in California; but there was an 80% increase in the number of such domestic violence calls involving reported use or threatened use of firearms.<sup>48</sup> In 2021, the number of such domestic violence calls involving firearms reported in California reached the highest level since 1995.<sup>49</sup> An abusive partner’s access to firearms increases risk of female victim homicide by 1,000%.<sup>50</sup>



Source: OGVP analysis of data from CA DOJ, 2022 “Crime in California” Report, Table 48, <https://data-openjustice.doj.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/Crime%20In%20CA%202022f.pdf>.

48 Based on OGVP analysis of data from CA DOJ, 2022 “Crime in California” Report, Table 48, <https://data-openjustice.doj.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/Crime%20In%20CA%202022f.pdf>.

49 Id.

50 National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, “Domestic Violence & Firearms” (2022), [https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2497/guns\\_and\\_dv\\_2022.pdf](https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2497/guns_and_dv_2022.pdf) (citing Spencer, C. M. & Stith, S. M., “Risk factors for male perpetration and female victimization of intimate partner homicide: A meta-analysis,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 21(3), 527-540 (2020)).

Domestic violence drives a significant share of violence perpetrated against women and children in particular. At the national level, FBI data indicated in that in 2021, at least 50% of female murder victims in the U.S. (and at least 16% of male murder victims) were killed by a current or former intimate partner or family member.<sup>51</sup> This is likely a significant undercount since the victim-offender relationship was unlisted or reported as “unknown” for an additional 20% of female victim murders.<sup>52</sup>

In 2022, Gun Violence Archive data indicated that more than twice as many minors were killed or injured in domestic violence shootings in the U.S. than in school shootings.<sup>53</sup> These records also documented a 65% increase in the number of minors killed or injured in domestic violence shootings nationwide from 2019 to 2021.<sup>54</sup>

People who have perpetrated domestic violence and abuse in the past are often at higher risk for perpetrating subsequent acts of violence and abuse against family or household members, intimate partners, and others. A review of domestic violence homicides in five cities, including San Diego, found that more than one-third of men implicated in domestic violence homicides from 2007-2017 had a publicly known history of domestic abuse or violence in the form of a restraining order against them or a previous criminal conviction for domestic abuse or a violent crime.<sup>55</sup> As discussed further below, many mass shooters also have a history of perpetrating domestic violence and abuse.

Under California law, people convicted of misdemeanor assault, criminal threats, and domestic violence offenses are generally prohibited from accessing firearms for at least 10 years after conviction.<sup>56</sup>

California also provides options for people who are worried about their safety from a current or former spouse or dating partner, a close family member, or a person with whom they have a child in common, to obtain court protection orders like the Domestic Violence Restraining Order (DVRO). This restraining order includes a range of safety protections, including court orders requiring the respondent to stay-away from and not contact the protected party *and* legally prohibiting the respondent from acquiring or possessing firearms and ammunition as long as the restraining order is in effect. For more information about these and other court ordered-firearm restrictions, see the [California Courts Self-Help Guide to Domestic Violence Restraining Orders in California](#).<sup>57</sup>

People who are worried about their safety and want to obtain court protection orders against a person with whom they do not have a close family, household, or dating partner relationship can obtain Civil Harassment Restraining Orders, Workplace Violence Restraining Orders, and other restraining orders that include firearm restrictions.

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51 FBI Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Female Murder Victims and Victim-Offender Relationship, 2021” (Dec. 2022), <https://bjs.ojp.gov/female-murder-victims-and-victim-offender-relationship-2021>.

52 Id.

53 See Jennifer Mascia, “Dangerous Homes: Guns and Domestic Violence Exact a Deadly Toll on Kids,” *The Trace* (Mar. 23, 2023), <https://www.thetrace.org/2023/03/guns-domestic-violence-child-deaths/>.

54 See id.

55 See Katie Zezima, et al., “Domestic Slayings: Brutal and Foreseeable,” *The Washington Post* (Dec. 9, 2018), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/investigations/domestic-violence-murders/>.

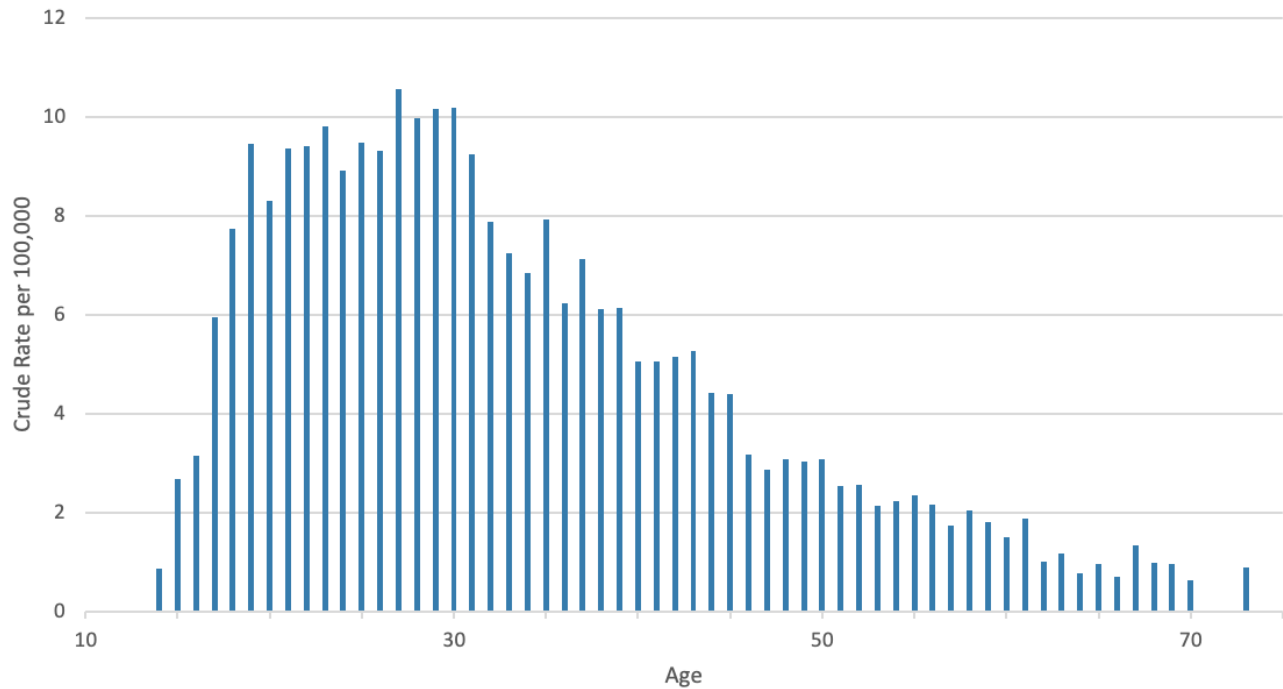
56 See California DOJ, Bureau of Firearms, “Firearm Prohibiting Categories,” (Rev. March 2023), <https://www.oag.ca.gov/system/files/media/prohibcatmisd.pdf>.

57 California Courts Self-Help Guide to Domestic Violence Restraining Orders in California, <https://selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/DV-restraining-order>.

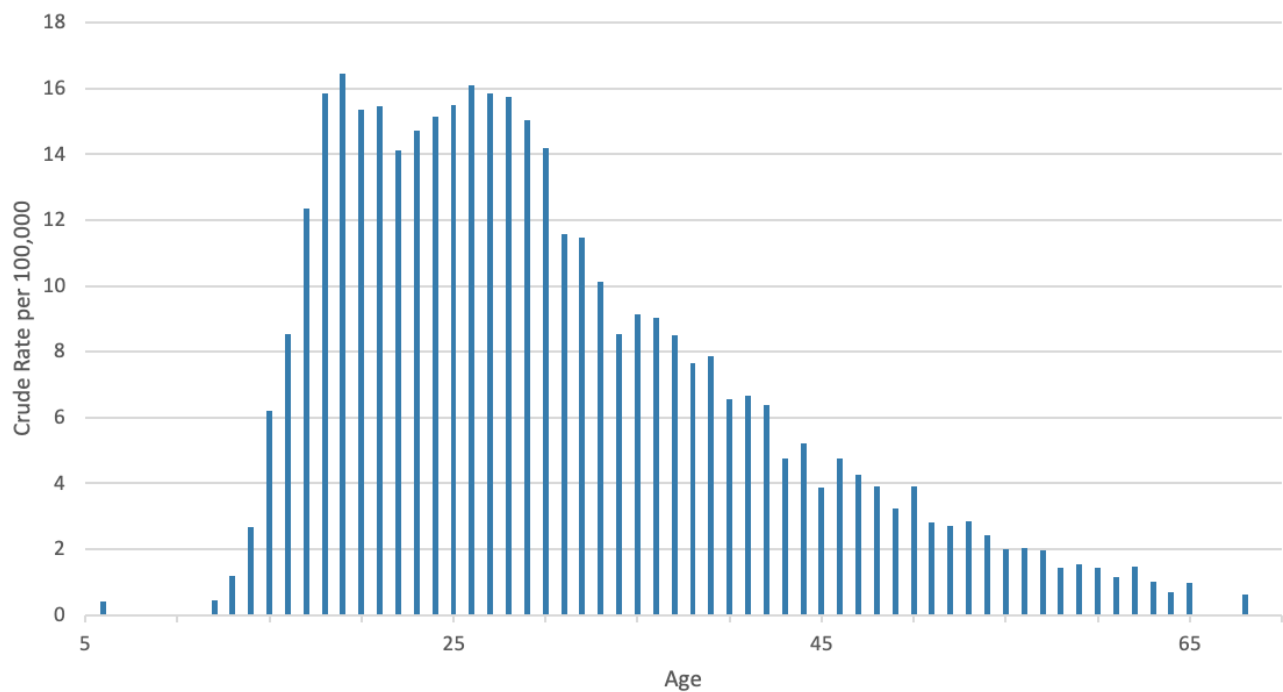
## Gun Homicide & Gun Assault Hospitalization Rates by Age in California

The graphs below show the age distribution for rates of gun homicide and gun assault hospitalization in California from 2016-2021. Victimization rates by age are similar for both fatal and nonfatal outcomes, peaking in the years between late adolescence through the early 30's.

### Gun Homicide Rates by Age



### Gun Assault Hospitalization Rates by Age

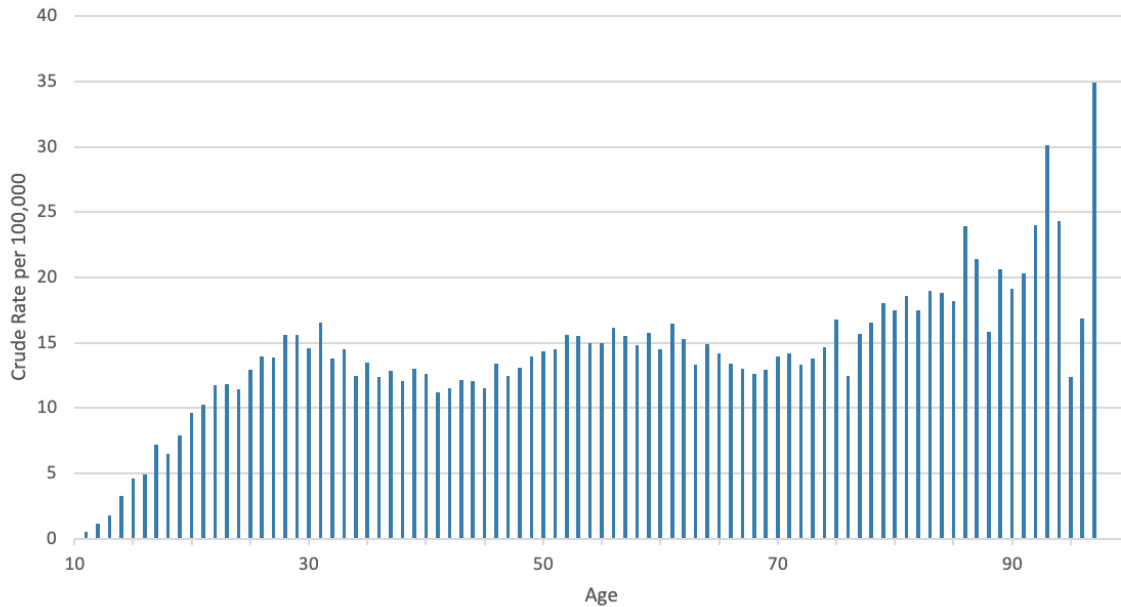


Source: Based on data from CDPH EpiCenter showing crude (non-age-adjusted) firearm homicide and firearm assault hospitalization incident rates per 100,000 for 2016-2021.

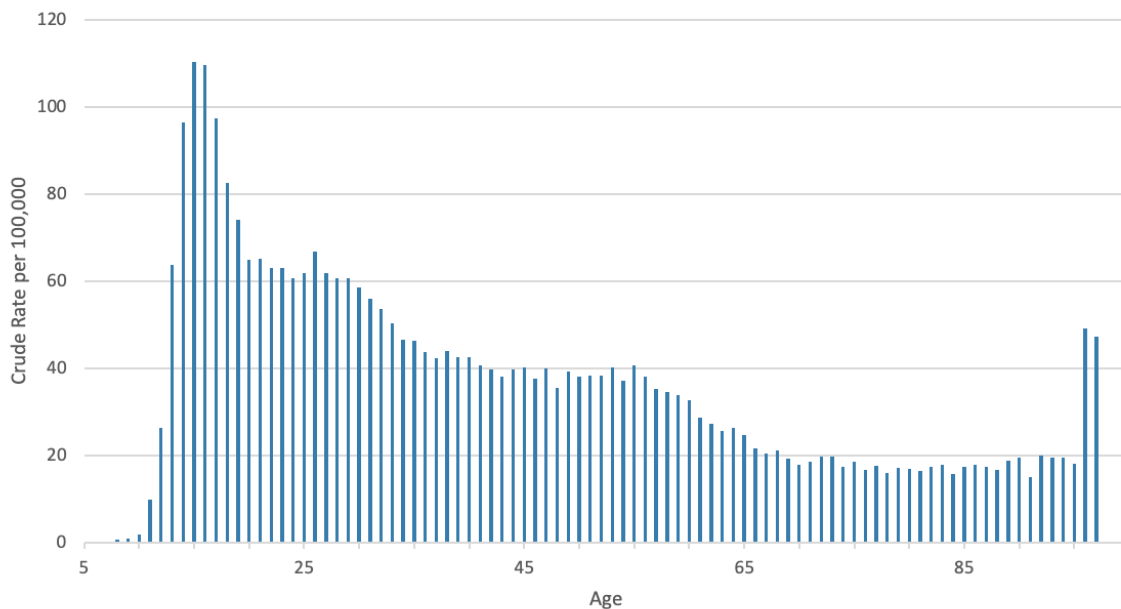
## Intentional Self-Harm by Any Method, Rates by Age in California

The graphs below show the age distribution for rates of suicide and nonfatal intentional self-harm hospitalizations in California from 2016-2021 involving any method (including but not limited to firearms). The age group most likely to require serious medical attention for self-injury and suicide attempt is not the age group most likely to die by suicide. Adolescents and young adults are at highest risk for nonfatal self-harm injuries requiring *hospitalization*, while older adults are much more likely to die from self-harm injuries on average. As the graphs on the next page show, differences related to firearm usage in self-harm incidents play a significant role.

Overall (All-Method) Suicide Death Rate by Age



Overall (All-Method) Self-Harm Hospitalization Rates by Age

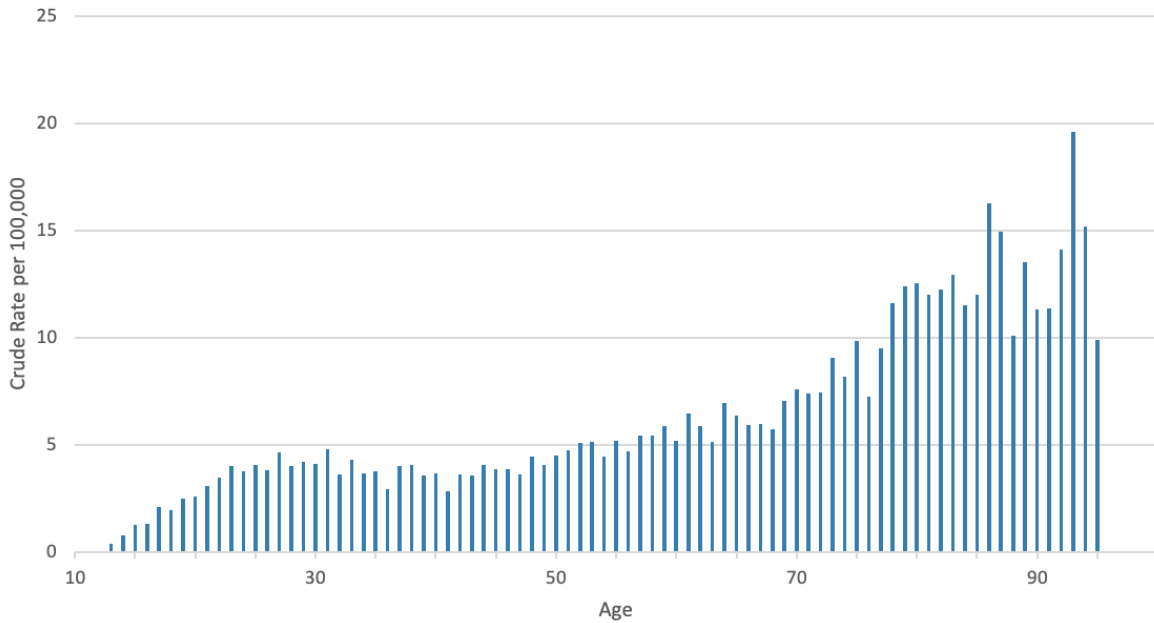


Source: Based on data from CDPH EpiCenter showing crude (non-age-adjusted) suicide and intentional self-harm hospitalization incident rates (involving any method of self-injury) per 100,000 for 2016-2021.

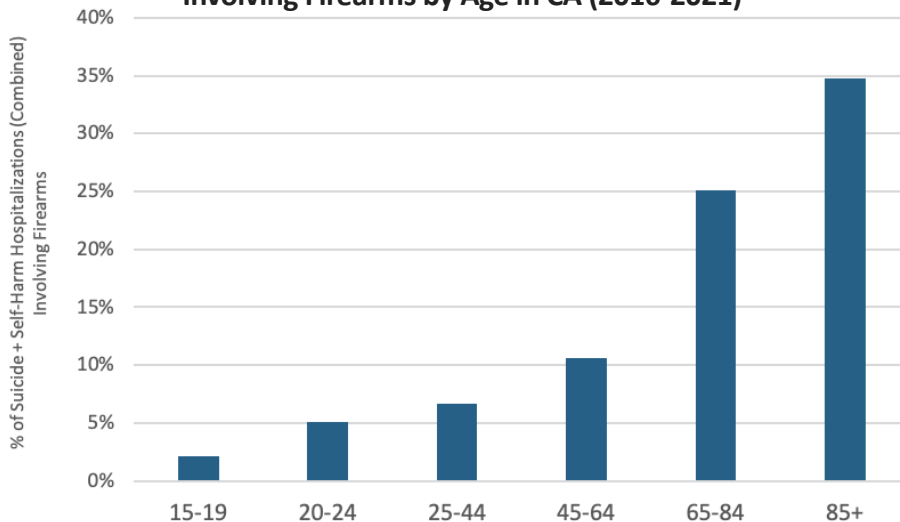
## Intentional Self-Harm with Firearms, Rates by Age in CA

The first graph below shows the age distribution for rates of *firearm* suicide in California from 2016-2021.<sup>58</sup> The second graph shows, for each age group, the percentage of all suicide or intentional self-harm hospitalizations that involve self-inflicted gunshot injuries.<sup>59</sup> Though adolescents and young adults are more likely to require serious medical attention for suicide attempts and self-injury, older adults are much more likely to attempt suicide or intentionally inflict life-threatening self-injury with firearms.<sup>60</sup> Because of the unique lethality of self-inflicted firearm injuries, older adults are much more likely to die by suicide overall.

**Gun Suicide Rates by Age**



**% of Suicides & Self-Harm Hospitalizations (Combined) Involving Firearms by Age in CA (2016-2021)**



Source: Based on data from CDPH EpiCenter showing crude (non-age-adjusted) firearm suicide rates per 100,000 for 2016-2021. The second graph is based on OGVP's analysis of data from CDPH EpiCenter on the number of firearm suicides and firearm-related self-harm hospitalizations in CA, by age group, for 2016-2021.

58 Based on OGVP analysis of death and hospitalization data from CDPH Epicenter for 2016-2021.

59 Id.

60 Id.



OGVP’s analysis of California Department of Public Health data found that in 2021, firearms were used in 3% of intentional self-harm incidents in California that resulted in death or required urgent medical attention in the form of hospitalization or emergency department care.<sup>61</sup> (This is an imperfect proxy for the incidence of suicide attempts: some individuals survive suicide attempts without seeking hospitalization or emergency department care, while other people may require serious medical attention for intentional self-harm injuries that were not necessarily intended to be lethal).

Out of all of these life-threatening or medically urgent self-injuries in California in 2021, 91% involving firearms resulted in death, compared to 5% that did not involve firearms.<sup>62</sup> If incidents resulting in emergency department admissions are excluded, firearms were used in 9% of the especially grave or fatal self-harm incidents resulting in death or hospitalization; 94% involving firearms resulted in death, compared to 16% that did not involve firearms.<sup>63</sup>

Gunshot injuries constituted less than 1% of intentional self-harm incidents requiring hospitalization or emergency department care in California in 2021, but constituted 38% of California’s suicide deaths.<sup>64</sup>

At the national level, researchers have similarly estimated that firearms are used in 5-6% of suicide attempts and account for about half of all suicide fatalities.<sup>65</sup>

A majority of people who attempt suicide are able to survive that attempt or act to reverse the attempt before it’s too late.<sup>66</sup> The vast majority—90%—of suicide attempt survivors do not go on to die by suicide.<sup>67</sup> This is an important message for long-term hope and resilience. But people who reach for firearms in periods of suicidal crisis rarely have a second chance.

**If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available.**

**Call or text 988 to reach the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline or chat [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org). The 988 Lifeline provides 24/7 free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for providers in the United States.**

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61 Id.

62 Id.

63 Id.

64 Id.

65 See Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, “Confronting the Inevitability Myth” Report, [https://files.giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Giffords-Law-Center-Confronting-The-Inevitability-Myth\\_9.3.18.pdf](https://files.giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Giffords-Law-Center-Confronting-The-Inevitability-Myth_9.3.18.pdf); Rebecca S. Spicer, MPH, and Ted R. Miller, PhD, “Suicide Acts in 8 States: Incidence and Case Fatality Rates by Demographics and Method,” *American Journal of Public Health* (2000).

66 See American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (noting that in 2021, there were an estimated 1.7 million suicide attempts and 48,183 suicide deaths in the U.S.), <https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics>.

67 See Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, “Means Matter: Attempters’ Longterm Survival”, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/survival/> (noting that approximately 70% of people who attempt suicide and survived had no further attempts and that about 90% who attempt suicide and survive do not go on to die by suicide).

## Mass Shootings

California has been a leader in efforts to help intervene and prevent shootings before they occur, such as by enacting one of the nation’s first “red flag” laws,<sup>68</sup> and by acting to restrict commerce in a subset of uniquely dangerous weapons and devices, including machine guns, assault weapons, large-capacity magazines, and rapid-fire trigger activators.

Different sources use varying definitions for “mass shooting”. Some sources examine the number of people shot, while others use more restrictive definitions that only examine the number of people killed. Some sources only include shootings that occur in public spaces.

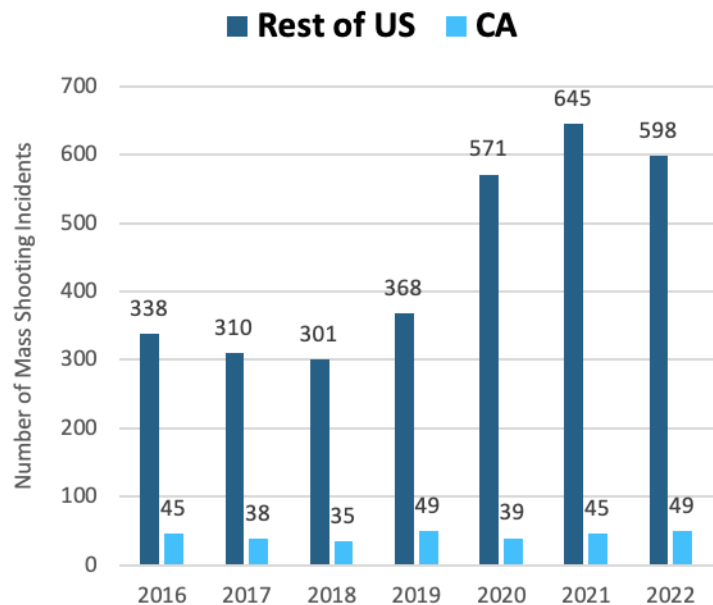
According to most definitions, mass shootings have become more frequent and higher casualty on average across the United States. Of the 10 highest casualty shootings in modern U.S. history, six occurred between 2016 and 2022.

The Gun Violence Archive defines a “mass shooting” as any time in which a person shot at least four other people in a single incident. According to this definition, in 2018, the nonprofit Gun Violence Archive recorded 336 mass shootings across the U.S., including 35 in California and 301 in the rest of the nation combined. The number of mass shooting incidents nationwide rose to 417 in 2019, 610 in 2020, and 690 in 2021, before dropping slightly to 647 in 2022.<sup>69</sup>

Gun Violence Archive data shows that across the nation, 1,585 people were killed in mass shootings (not including the shooter) from 2019 to 2021 alone, and nearly 7,000 more people were shot and injured in these attacks.<sup>70</sup> In California, 152 people were killed in mass shootings over this period and 509 more were shot.<sup>71</sup>

At the national level, these 1,585 mass shooting deaths represented 3% of the nearly 55,000 people killed in gun homicides over this period, underscoring the enormous broader societal impact of gun violence in the U.S.,<sup>72</sup> including tens of

**Number of Mass Shooting Incidents (4+ victims shot) by Year**  
(Gun Violence Archive database)



68 “Red flag law” generally refers to a legal process that authorizes eligible petitioners to present evidence to a court that an individual has demonstrated a significant risk of harming themselves or others; these laws authorize courts, upon finding sufficient evidence, to issue a civil order that suspends the respondent’s legal access to firearms and ammunition for a temporary period. California’s process is called the “Gun Violence Restraining Order” or GVRO. California law also provides additional options for people experiencing threats, violence, stalking, or abuse to obtain restraining orders that prohibit the respondent from accessing firearms and ammunition for a temporary period, including but not limited to domestic violence, civil harassment, and workplace violence restraining orders.

69 OGVP analysis of incident records from the Gun Violence Archive database at [GunViolenceArchive.org](https://www.gunviolencearchive.org)

70 Id.

71 Id.

72 Data from the CDC WONDER Database indicates that 54,756 people were killed in firearm homicides in the US from 2019-2021.

thousands of shootings that may never make the news.<sup>73</sup>

In 68% of mass shootings, the shooter had a history of domestic violence and/or killed a family member or intimate partner.<sup>74</sup> Many other mass shootings have been motivated by conspiracies or hateful ideologies and perpetrated as hate crimes.

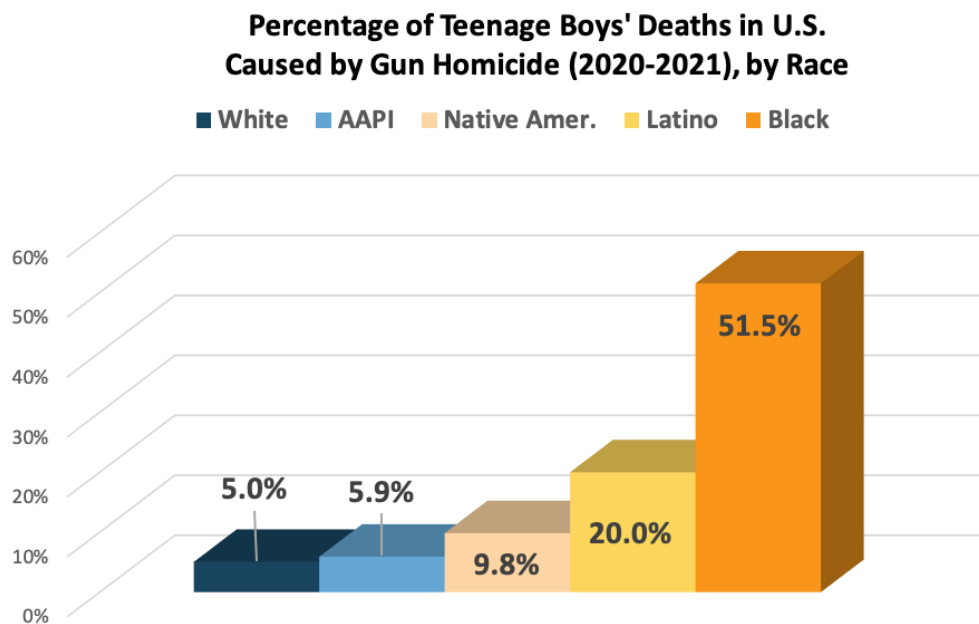
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73 See, e.g., Elinore J. Kaufman, et al., “Making the news: Victim characteristics associated with media reporting on firearm injury,” *Preventive Medicine*, Vol. 141 (Dec. 2020), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0091743520302991> (study finding that half of all shootings were not reported in the news).

74 National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, “Domestic Violence & Firearms” (2022), at [https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2497/guns\\_and\\_dv\\_2022.pdf](https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2497/guns_and_dv_2022.pdf) (citing Geller, L. B., et al., “The role of domestic violence in fatal mass shootings in the United States, 2014-2019,” *Injury Epidemiology* Vol. 8 (38) (2021)).

## Racial Inequities in Safety

While gun violence harms all communities, its toll and traumas are not borne evenly.<sup>75</sup> The chart below presents OGVP’s analysis of CDC mortality data showing the percentage of 13-19 year old boys’ deaths in the United States that were caused by gun homicide from 2020-2021, broken down by race and ethnicity.



From 2020-2021, gun homicides were responsible for a significant 5% of all deaths among white, non-Hispanic teenage boys over this period, similar to the number who died from cancer and over four times the number who died from COVID-19.<sup>76</sup> But gun homicide was an even more significant factor in deaths for boys in every other racial or ethnic group.

As this chart shows, at the height of a global health pandemic, the parents of a Black teenage son in the United States were more likely to lose their child to gun homicide than to every other cause of death combined.<sup>77</sup> In California, gun homicide caused 38% of deaths among Black teenage males over this period, compared to 4% of deaths among white teenage males.<sup>78</sup>

In 2022, at the national level, 59% of all gun homicide victims were Black and 18% were Hispanic or Latino. In California, 31% of gun homicide victims were Black and 50% were Hispanic or Latino.<sup>79</sup>

75 Shani Buggs, et al., “Social and Structural Determinants of Community Firearm Violence and Community Trauma,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 704 (1) 2023), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00027162231173324>. See also, Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, “In Pursuit of Peace: Building Police-Community Trust to Break the Cycle of Violence” (Sep. 9, 2021), <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/report/in-pursuit-of-peace-building-police-community-trust-to-break-the-cycle-of-violence>; Boston University School of Public Health, “Residential Segregation Associated with Black-White Disparity in Firearm Homicide Rates” (Jul. 13, 2018), <https://www.bu.edu/sph/2018/07/13/residential-segregation-associated-with-black-white-disparity-in-firearm-homicide-rates/>.

76 Based on OGVP analysis of Underlying Cause of Death data from CDC WONDER for 2020-2021. For these purposes, “white” and “Black” refer to individuals who are not also identified as Hispanic or Latino in CDC data.

77 OGVP analysis of data from CDC WONDER for 2020-2021 (firearm homicides as percentage of all deaths for 13-19 year old males).

78 Id.

79 OGVP analysis of data from CDC WONDER for 2022 (2022 data provisional). Of the 19,592 firearm homicide victims in 2022 nationwide, 11,546 were identified as non-Hispanic Black and 3,489 were identified as Hispanic or Latino. Of the 1,671 firearm homicide victims in 2022 in California, 834 were identified as Hispanic or Latino and 521 were identified as non-Hispanic Black.

## ***Gun Assault Survivors & Risk of Violent Reinjury in California***

From 2016-2021, there were 24,612 shootings in California in which the victim survived being shot and seriously injured in gun assaults requiring hospitalization or emergency department care. 12,969 of these shootings required hospitalization.<sup>80</sup> This is only a count of the most medically urgent gun assault injuries over this period: A larger number of people were shot, shot at, or witnessed a shooting.

**OGVP’s analysis of data from the California Department of Public Health indicates that among Californians hospitalized for nonfatal firearm assault injuries from 2020-2021:<sup>81</sup>**

- 89% were male
- 79% were identified as Hispanic (43%) or Black (36%)
- Just over half were under the age of 30 and over three-quarters were under the age of 40:
  - o 16% aged 13-19
  - o 37% aged 20-29
  - o 26% aged 30-39
- Just under half (46%) were hospitalized for 5 days or more
- 73% received health insurance through California’s Medicaid program (Medi-Cal)
- 85% were publicly insured or uninsured for health care coverage
  - o This is another indicator that interpersonal gun violence disproportionately impacts people who have lower income and economic security.
  - o It also has important implications for the role victim service and health care systems—especially Medi-Cal—play in providing effectively tailored trauma recovery and support services for gun assault patients in their care.

This public health data indicates that in 2020-2021, the modal patient<sup>82</sup> hospitalized for nonfatal gun assault injuries in California was a Hispanic or Black male in his 20’s, admitted to the hospital on a weekend, hospitalized for over one week, and publicly insured through Medi-Cal.<sup>83</sup>

Many gun assault survivors are left to grapple with life-altering traumas, impairments and disfigurements, and physical and mental wounds.

Many are also at extremely elevated risk of being shot again and killed after they are discharged from the hospital back into their community and the precarious circumstances that led to their initial life-threatening injuries. Researchers affiliated with the University of California Firearm Violence Research Center followed outcomes for patients hospitalized or treated in emergency departments for gun

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80 Based on OGVP analysis of data from CDPH EpiCenter for 2016-2021.

81 Id.

82 Based on OGVP analysis of data from CDPH EpiCenter for 2020-2021, identifying most common race/ethnicity, gender, age, day of admission, duration of hospital stay, and expected insurance provider for individuals hospitalized for firearm assault injuries in California from 2020-2021.

83 OGVP analysis of data from CDPH EpiCenter for 2020-2021.

assault injuries in California from 2005-2013; they found that, compared to the statewide average, the gun homicide rate was over **60 times higher** for people who had previously survived one nonfatal gun assault injury, and **over 120 times higher** for people who had survived multiple.<sup>84</sup>

Another study followed outcomes for gun assault patients who were treated and discharged from a major trauma center in Oakland, California. For gun assault patients who survived an initial shooting but then died within five years after being discharged from the hospital, **79%** were killed in a subsequent gun homicide.<sup>85</sup> Gun assault survivors were at especially high risk during the first year after discharge, a period when they were **over 5 times** more likely to die overall compared to patients who had been hospitalized for non-firearm assault injuries.<sup>86</sup>

To place shooting survivors' risk of violent re-injury in context, it is important to note that nationwide, a large majority of shootings do not lead to an arrest. An analysis of 202 municipal police departments nationwide estimated that in 2017, only 30% of aggravated gun assaults and 46% of firearm homicides were cleared by arrest or other means.<sup>87</sup> FBI data indicates that clearance rates for shootings and homicides nationally have further declined since that time.<sup>88</sup> In the typical case, a gun assault survivor may be returned to a community and circumstances where one or more people who nearly killed them remain at large. Some researchers have documented how these dynamics may make it more likely that a subset of survivors or others close to them will resort to vigilante retaliation, fueling devastating cycles of shootings that can spread like a contagion through social networks and leave many more people in surrounding communities more traumatized and vulnerable in the cross-fire.<sup>89</sup>

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84 Veronica Pear, et al., "Risk factors for assaultive reinjury and death following a nonfatal firearm assault injury: A population-based retrospective cohort study," *Prev Med.*, Vol. 139 (2020).

85 Jahan Fahimi, et al., "Long-term mortality of patients surviving firearm violence," *Inj Prev.*, Vol. 22 (2) (2016).

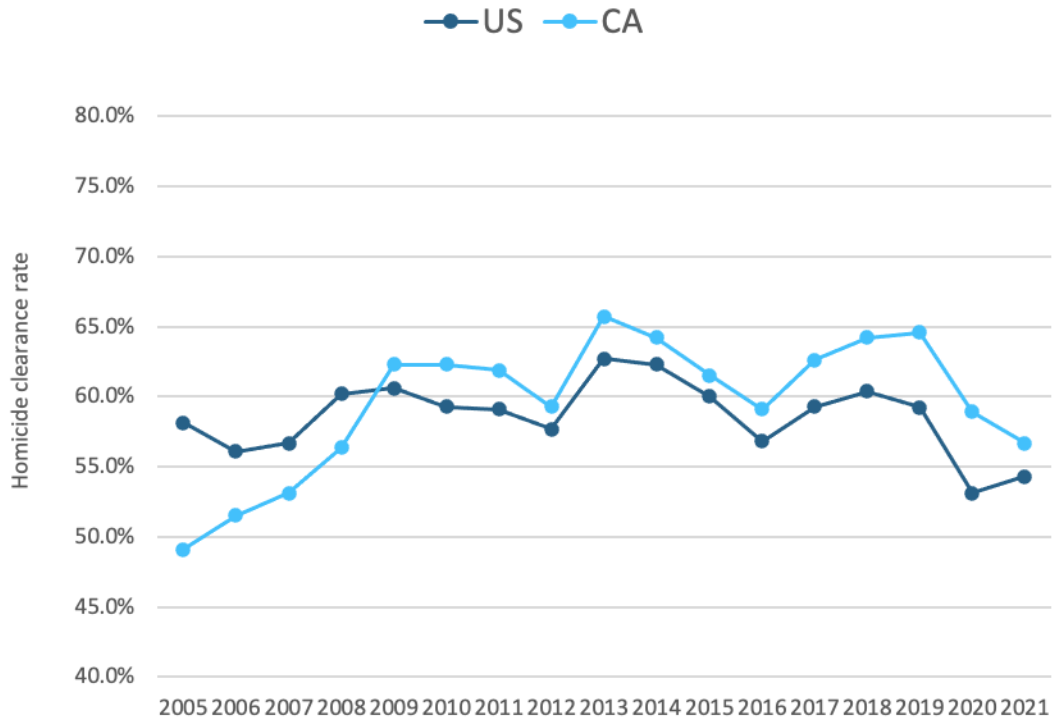
86 Id.

87 See Sarah Ryley, et al., "5 Things to Know About Cities' Failure to Arrest Shooters," *The Trace* (Jan. 24, 2019), <https://www.thetrace.org/2019/01/gun-murder-solve-rate-understaffed-police-data-analysis/>. See also, Wesley Lowery, et al., "Murder with Impunity: An Unequal Justice," *The Washington Post* (Updated Jul. 24, 2018), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/national/murder-with-impunity/>; Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, "In Pursuit of Peace: Building Police-Community Trust to Break the Cycle of Violence" (Updated Sept. 9, 2021).

88 Based on data from Murder Accountability Project, Analysis of FBI Uniform Crime Reports data (2005-2021), at <https://www.murderdata.org/p/blog-page.html>.

89 See, e.g., Thomas Abt, *Bleeding Out: The Devastating Consequences of Urban Violence -- And A Bold New Plan For Peace In The Streets*, Basic Books (2019); Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, "In Pursuit of Peace: Building Police-Community Trust to Break the Cycle of Violence" (Updated Sept. 9, 2021); Melissa Tracy, et al., "The Transmission of Gun and Other Weapon-Involved Violence Within Social Networks," *Epidemiol Rev.*, Vol. 38 (1) (2016); Ben Green, et al., "Modeling Contagion Through Social Networks to Explain and Predict Gunshot Violence in Chicago, 2006 to 2014," *JAMA Intern Med.*, Vol. 177 (3) (2017).

## Overall Homicide Clearance Rates by Year CA & US



Data Source for graph: Murder Accountability Project, Analysis of FBI Uniform Crime Reports homicide clearance data (2005-2021).<sup>90</sup>

90 Murder Accountability Project, Analysis of FBI Uniform Crime Reports homicide clearance data (2005-2021), <https://www.murderdata.org/p/blog-page.html>. The homicide clearance rate is calculated as the total number of homicides reported as cleared (by arrest or other means) as a percentage of the total number of homicides for that year.



## Breaking the Cycle of Violence

This cycle of shootings, injury, trauma, and retaliation means there is a significant overlap between those who have been direct or secondary victims of community gun violence and those who later commit community gun violence.<sup>91</sup> Most victims do not become offenders, but most people involved in perpetrating community gun violence have been victims of violence.<sup>92</sup>

These cycles of community gun violence perpetrated by a relatively small number of people drive a significant portion of gun violence in many cities. Researchers with the National Network for Safe Communities examined data from nearly two dozen cities across the U.S. and found that on average, at least half of homicides and 55% of nonfatal shootings in those cities were perpetrated by and/or against people known by law enforcement to be affiliated with gangs, “street groups,” or social networks engaged in violence; these groups were found to make up less than 1% of the population of those cities, even in neighborhoods with some of the highest rates of violence in the country, yet were connected to about half these cities’ shootings.<sup>93</sup>

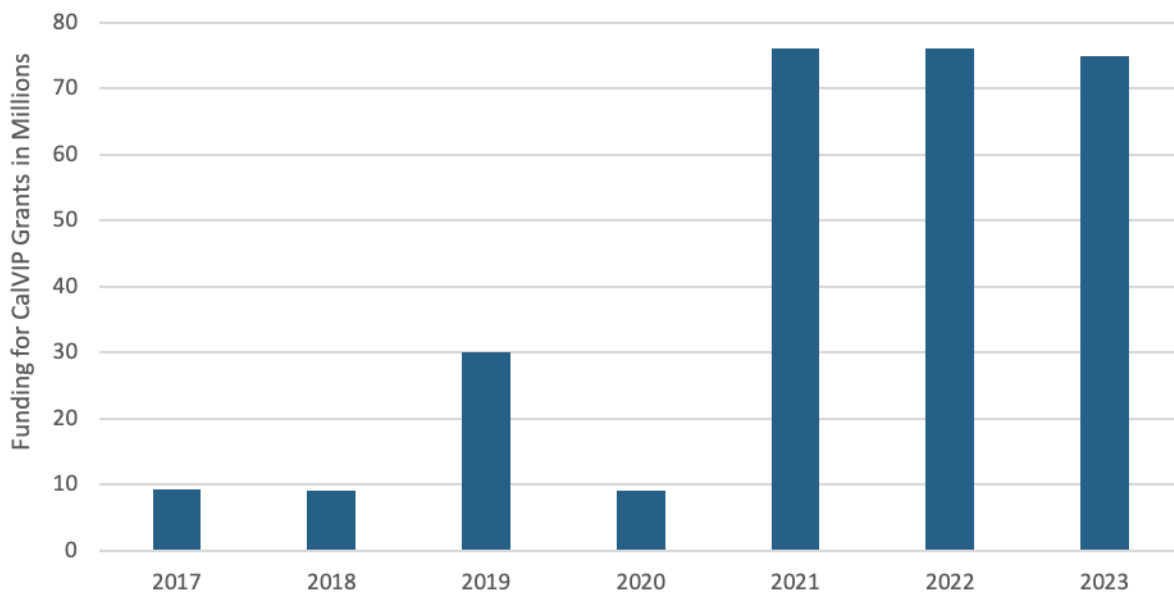
There are effective strategies for intervention, prevention, and aftercare to help assertively engage gun assault patients and other individuals at highest risk with a range of supports to promote their safety, trauma recovery, and desistance from violence; these may include targeted peer support and mentorship from people with similar experiences, conflict mediation, cognitive behavioral therapy, trauma counseling, system navigation, and relocation assistance away from dangerous circumstances.<sup>94</sup> These strategies fall under the umbrella term “community violence intervention.”<sup>95</sup> They rely on credible, authentic messengers being able to break through and engage victims of violence and others at highest risk, a population that has often been violently traumatized and alienated from criminal justice, health, mental health, victim service, and other systems and supports.<sup>96</sup> Gun assault patients and others at highest risk are, on average, less likely to be shot again, and less likely to engage in acts of retaliatory violence, if they receive evidence-based community violence intervention care services.<sup>97</sup>

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- 91 Shani Buggs, et al., “Social and Structural Determinants of Community Firearm Violence and Community Trauma,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 704 (1) (2023), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00027162231173324>; Wesley Jennings, et al., “On the overlap between victimization and offending: A review of the literature,” *Aggression and Violent Behavior* Vol. 17 (1) (2012).
- 92 See, e.g., Council on Criminal Justice, Violent Crime Working Group, “Victimization, Trauma, Mental Health, and Violent Crime,” (Nov. 17, 2021), <https://counciloncj.org/vcwg-meeting-bulletin-6/>.
- 93 See Stephen Lurie, et al., “The Less Than 1%: Groups and the Extreme Concentration of Urban Violence,” National Network for Safe Communities; Stephen Lurie, Alexis Acevedo, and Kyle Ott, “Presentation: The Less Than 1%: Groups and the Extreme Concentration of Urban Violence,” National Network for Safe Communities (Nov. 2018), [https://cdn.theatlantic.com/assets/media/files/nnsc\\_gmi\\_concentration\\_asc\\_v1.91.pdf](https://cdn.theatlantic.com/assets/media/files/nnsc_gmi_concentration_asc_v1.91.pdf).
- 94 See Shani Buggs, et al., “Social and Structural Determinants of Community Firearm Violence and Community Trauma,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 704 (1)(2023), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00027162231173324>; U.S. DOJ, Bureau of Justice Assistance “Community Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative (CVIPI)”, Apr. 19, 2022, <https://bja.ojp.gov/program/community-violence-intervention/overview>
- 95 See U.S. DOJ, Bureau of Justice Assistance “Community Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative (CVIPI)”, Apr. 19, 2022, <https://bja.ojp.gov/program/community-violence-intervention/overview>.
- 96 Shani Buggs, et al., “Social and Structural Determinants of Community Firearm Violence and Community Trauma,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 704 (1)(2023), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00027162231173324>.
- 97 See, e.g., id.; Health Alliance for Violence Intervention, “Hospital-based Violence Intervention: Practices and Policies to End the Cycle of Violence,” <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d6f61730a2b610001135b79/t/5d83c0d9056f4d4cbdb9acd9/1568915699707/NNHVIP+White+Paper.pdf>; Giffords Center for Violence Intervention, “Intervention Strategies,” <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/other-laws-policies/intervention-strategies/>; California Health Benefits Review Program, “Analysis of California Assembly Bill 166 Violence Preventive Services” (Apr. 21, 2019), <https://www.chbrp.org/sites/default/files/bill-documents/AB166/ab166-FullReport.pdf>.

But a 2019 report by the California Health Benefits Review Program estimated that just 3% of California Medi-Cal enrollees treated for community-violence-related injuries received such services in California.<sup>98</sup> (As described above, Medi-Cal was the expected health insurer for 73% of people hospitalized for gun assault injuries in California in 2020-2021.<sup>99</sup>)

Since that Health Benefits Review Program report in 2019, California has made substantial new investments to help expand and sustain community gun violence intervention programs that seek to interrupt cycles of violence, trauma, and retaliation, especially through the California Violence Intervention and Prevention (CalVIP) Grant Program, launched in 2017. Most of the funds awarded through the CalVIP program were distributed to fund multi-year projects in two rounds of grant awards in July and October 2022.

### California Budget Act Investments in CalVIP (Break the Cycle of Violence Act) Grants



In 2022, California also became one of the first states to pass legislation creating a pathway for Medicaid coverage for violence prevention counseling and support services for people who have been victims of community violence, chronically exposed to community violence, or who are otherwise identified by qualified healthcare providers as high-risk for violent injury from community violence.<sup>100</sup> This new benefit will be rolled out as a component of California’s broader new Community Health Worker (CHW) Preventive Services effort.<sup>101</sup>

98 See California Health Benefits Review Program, “Analysis of California Assembly Bill 166 Violence Preventive Services” (Apr. 21, 2019), p. 28, <https://www.chbrp.org/sites/default/files/bill-documents/AB166/ab166-FullReport.pdf>.

99 Based on OGVP’s analysis of data from CDPH EpiCenter for 2020-2021.

100 See 2022 CA AB 1929.

101 See CA Department of Health Care Services, “All Plan Letter 22-016 (Revised): Community Health Worker Services Benefit” (Sep. 9, 2022), <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/formsandpubs/Documents/MMCDAPLsandPolicyLetters/APL2022/APL22-016.pdf>.