



The State of Gun Violence in America's Major Cities  
August 2022

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## **Introduction**

As our nation continues to work through the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, political divisiveness, social unrest, and economic hardships, it is necessary to take a serious look at the increase in gun violence plaguing our major cities across the country. At the end of 2021, the Major Cities Chiefs Association (MCCA) launched a Gun Violence Working Group consisting of chiefs and command staff to discuss the intricacies of gun violence. This report's goal is to demonstrate the complexities of gun violence and suggest solutions which will help aid law enforcement across the country decrease the number of tragedies which have become far too common.

This report will cover many topics including the increase in the proliferation of guns, current gun trends, increases in juvenile gun crime, judicial and prosecutorial implications, Second Amendment and responsible gun ownership issues, and support for victims. It should be made clear that these topics should not be looked at as separate issues, but as a whole. In discussing these topics, this report will look at the current snapshot of each topic area, and will follow with suggestions, best practices, and/or strategies for law enforcement agencies across the country to consider implementing. Central to the conversation and discussions of the Working Group was to make sure that any reforms or changes to public policy respect the Second Amendment and the citizens who responsibly exercise this right.

In May 2022, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released startling new statistics regarding gun violence during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the United States saw the highest firearm homicide rate in over 25 years, where 79% of the homicides involved the use of a firearm. This was a 35% increase year over year from 2019. Further, almost all demographics and geographic locations saw increases – both homicides of men and women saw increases as well as increases in metropolitan cities as well as rural towns. However, the largest increase of the firearm homicide rate affected African American young males between the ages of 10 and 44.<sup>1</sup>

These alarming statistics demonstrate the need to have a robust conversation regarding the driving factors and systematic failures which has led to the stark increase in gun violence. By bringing together a diverse group of police chiefs and command staff to discuss these trends, the goal of identifying key problems and offer potential solutions to these issues was accomplished.

In 2018, the Major Cities Chiefs Association became one of the first leading law enforcement organizations to adopt a Firearms Violence Policy (see Appendix A) which includes public policy recommendations such as implementing the assault weapons ban, encouraging the implementation of 'red flag laws,' and banning high-capacity magazines. This report expands upon the member-adopted Firearms Violence Policy and discusses the most recent trends and statistics related to firearms violence in the United States and its major cities.

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<sup>1</sup> "Firearm Deaths Grow, Disparities Widen," *CDC.Gov*, May 10, 2022. <<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2022/s0510-vs-firearm-deathrates.html>>

The Major Cities Chiefs Association is dedicated to continuing to monitor this crisis afflicting our communities and is committed to working with its law enforcement partners at the federal, state, and local levels, as well as community associations, faith-based groups, victim advocacy organizations, and all other entities which are dedicated to curbing gun violence, driving down crime, supporting victims, and improving the communities where our citizens work and reside. As a professional organization of police executives representing the largest cities in the United States and Canada, it is the responsibility of this association to shine a light on the impact gun violence has had on our constituencies.

## **Current Gun Violence Trends**

The following subsections discuss the current trends with respect to gun violence and firearm possession within the United States. These trends include increases in firearm possession, ghost guns, and firearm modifications.

### **Increases in Firearm Possession**

MCCA members reported increases in the volume of firearms being located on the streets as well as an increase in crimes involving a firearm. While the proliferation of guns tend to ebb and flow, MCCA members reported two factors responsible for driving up the number of guns on the streets – theft and fraud; theft from vehicles and residences, and unemployment and government assistance fraud.

While there are regulations about who can and cannot possess firearms, violent criminals continue to find workarounds. While safe gun storage and responsibility will be discussed later, it is important to note that many of these recovered firearms are simply being taken from unlocked vehicles. On December 21, 2021, the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department reported 1,259 guns had been stolen out of vehicles throughout 2021, which accounted for more than 70% of the 1,789 guns stolen from citizens in total.<sup>2</sup> Many agencies reported that traffic stops had decreased during the pandemic due to fewer people travelling, and a reallocation of law enforcement resources however, many cities saw record numbers of firearms recovered from vehicles during the same period of time.

Further, during the COVID-19 pandemic, federal and state governments offered relief for citizens in the form of stimulus checks, government assistance programs, and business loans to ease the financial burden felt by many due to shutdowns and restrictions. While these programs greatly supported many Americans, it is now clear that many exploited these opportunities and used these funds to purchase firearms and illegal narcotics which, in turn, has led to an increase in the number of firearms available on the streets. In Brooklyn, New York, a group of 11 members of the Woo gang, tried to steal more than \$20 million in unemployment funds.<sup>3</sup> The group was able to take \$4.3 million before authorities were able to shut down their operation.

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<sup>2</sup> “1,259 guns stolen from Nashville vehicles this year, many used in violent crimes per MNPd,” *Fox 17 WZTV Nashville*, December 21, 2021. <<https://fox17.com/news/local/1259-guns-stolen-from-nashville-vehicles-this-year-many-used-in-violent-crimes-per-mnpd-tennessee-theft-crime-alertnest>>

<sup>3</sup> “Brooklyn gang members lived large on more than \$4 million on stolen COVID unemployment funds,” *New York Daily News*, February 17, 2022. <<https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nyc-crime/ny-brooklyn-gang-members-stole-millions-in-covid-aid-20220218-poe5moloafht3azdzwticm5xe-story.html>>

The massive fraudulent activities involving these government funds have a direct correlation to the increase of weapons being used for violent crime purposes.

### **Ghost Guns**

Over the past few years, MCCA members have witnessed sizable increases in the discovery of ghost guns, also referred to as privately manufactured firearms (PMF). A ghost gun is typically defined as an unregulated firearm that anyone — including minors and prohibited purchasers — can buy and build without a background check. Ghost guns are self-made by unlicensed manufacturers and contain no serial numbers. Ghost guns can also be obtained through means of 3-D printing which has been a growing market for obtaining firearms as well.

These weapons are easily obtained by prohibited persons, juveniles, and gang members. In 2021, the MCCA surveyed its membership and noted the following trends:

- From January 2019 through May 2021, MCCA member agencies saw a 408% increase in criminal incidents involving a ghost gun.
- Using the FBI Unified Crime Report definition of violent crime categories, MCCA members saw ghost guns used in aggravated assault, homicide, and robberies most often.
- From January 2019 through May 2021, MCCA member agencies saw a 240% increase in the use of ghost guns in criminal incidents by prohibited persons.
- From January 2019 to May 2021, MCCA member agencies saw a 285% increase in the use of ghost guns in criminal incidents by those under 21-years-old.
- From January 2019 to May 2021, MCCA member agencies saw a 273% increase in the use of ghost guns in criminal incidents by gang-related individuals.
- From January 2019 to May 2021, MCCA member agencies saw a 255% increase in the use of ghost guns in criminal incidents by those who had a prior conviction for a gun crime.



*A ghost gun kit purchased at a California gun show. Photo Courtesy: Brady United*

While there has been action by both state and the federal government to regulate the sale of ghost guns and ghost gun components, law enforcement across the country are continuing to regularly see these types of weapons used in violent and deadly crimes.

In the City of San Diego, the police department discovered 52 ghost guns throughout their criminal investigations in 2019. In 2020, the number rose to 211 and in 2021 it more than doubled to 545.<sup>4</sup> A Ghost Gun Unit has been launched to specifically tackle this issue within the police department.



*Ghost gun kits on display at a gun show for purchase. Photo Courtesy: Brady United*

On April 11, 2022, the Attorney General of the United States signed ATF Final Rule 2021R-05F, which revises many definitions related to firearms and tackles the issue of ghost guns by adding in certain requirements on proper firearm marking, recordkeeping, and traceability on all firearms which are manufactured and imported.<sup>5</sup> This is a first step in trying to regulate ghost guns to keep them out of the hands of criminals while trying to protect the rights of hobbyist firearm makers who follow the law.

### **Glock/Auto-Sear Switches**

While the amount of gun crimes and shootings have increased across the country, the sheer number of bullets used in these incidents have seen a dramatic increase as well. Throughout the nation, incidents of individuals indiscriminately shooting into large crowds while discharging massive amounts of ammunition has become far too common. This is most often occurring with the installation of a 'Glock', 'giggle', or 'auto-sear' switch to a semi-automatic firearm. *(It should be noted that Glock does not manufacture these devices and they are purchased after-market*

<sup>4</sup> "Ghost Guns Are Everywhere: San Diego's firefight continues to get ghost guns off the street," ABC 10 News San Diego, February 19, 2022. <<https://www.10news.com/news/local-news/ghost-guns-are-everywhere-san-diegos-firefight-continues-to-get-ghost-guns-off-of-the-street>>

<sup>5</sup> "Definition of 'frame or receiver' and Identification of Firearms," ATF.gov, April 11, 2022. <<https://www.atf.gov/rules-and-regulations/definition-frame-or-receiver>>



through the Internet or can be created using a 3-D printer.) These after-market alterations turn a semi-automatic firearm into a fully automatic firearm.



*A photo depicting a Glock switch and its installation to a firearm. Photo Courtesy: ATF*

In October 2021, four individuals in Minneapolis were shot when an SUV drove past and sprayed bullets from a semi-automatic weapon which had been transformed into a fully automatic weapon due to the addition of an auto-sear device to the handgun.<sup>6</sup>

The number of bullets spent in a criminal incident and the amount of shell casings being located at a scene continue to rise. Whether the bullets come from one weapon which has been modified to become fully automatic, or the gunfire is exchanged between multiple parties, it is no longer common to find a small number of shell casings at a scene during an investigation. In San Antonio, Texas, in February 2022, it was reported that over 70 shell casings were found during an investigation of one incident in a neighborhood.<sup>7</sup>

### **High-Capacity Magazines**

The availability of high-capacity magazines has made gun violence far more deadly and has increased the number of victims in any shooting situation, particularly in mass shooting events. A high-capacity magazine, depending on the definition, is an ammunition magazine or drum which can contain more than 10 rounds of ammunition. According to Brady United, “An analysis of mass shootings between 2009 to 2018 shows that in shootings where assault weapons were used, six times as many people were shot compared to those without them. Similarly, when high-capacity magazines were used in a mass shooting (59% of the time), five times as many people were shot compared to massacres carried out without them.”<sup>8</sup>

On May 24, 2022, Salvador Ramos shot 19 children and two teachers at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas using an AR-15 style weapon which can hold up to 30 rounds in a single

<sup>6</sup> “Illegal gun modification devices proliferate, resulting in more deadly rounds in Minneapolis,” *Star Tribune*, October 13, 2021.

<<https://www.startribune.com/illegal-gun-modification-devices-proliferate-resulting-in-more-deadly-rounds-in-minneapolis/600106352/>>

<sup>7</sup> “Video released of suspects accused of firing 70+ shots,” *CBS KENS 5 San Antonio*, February 16, 2022.

<<https://www.kens5.com/article/news/crime/video-released-of-suspects-accused-of-firing-70-shots-northeast-side-bcso/273-516a5ae1-275f-4a9e-a1d2-29d60a3dd99b>>

<sup>8</sup> “Resources: What are assault rifles and high-capacity magazines?,” *Brady United.org*. <<https://www.bradyunited.org/fact-sheets/what-are-assault-weapons-and-high-capacity-magazines>>

magazine.<sup>9</sup> While making it harder to obtain high-capacity magazines will not eliminate gun violence or mass shootings, it will certainly drive down the number of victims and potentially save lives by decreasing the amount of ammunition a shooter could potentially carry during an attack.



*The photo above is from an investigation conducted by the Los Angeles Police Department where an individual who was on probation for other firearms offenses was found with various firearms, high-capacity magazines, and a drum-style magazine. Photo Courtesy: Los Angeles Police Department*

### **Social Media and Drill Rap**

Social media is no stranger to being a central driver behind crime trends. Similarly, drill rap has become a leading cause of these deadly and often high-profile shootings and homicides. Drill rap's origins can be traced back to Chicago's South Side area in the early 2010s and includes influences of trap music which developed in the Atlanta music scene. The music typically has dark, slow beats and its lyrics focus on criminal activity.<sup>10</sup>

In February 2022, a *New York Post* article by Soren Baker titled "*The History of Gangster Rap*" stated, "Drill is basically gangster rap driven by social media beefs and social media tactics. It's real-time reactions to music and violence. Artists have gotten killed because they say, 'I have beef

<sup>9</sup> "Where AR-15-style rifles fit in America's tragic history of mass shootings," NPR, May 26, 2022. <<https://www.npr.org/2022/05/26/1101274322/ualde-ar-15-style-rifle-history-shooter-mass-shooting>>

<sup>10</sup> "Guide to Drill Music: History and Characteristics of Drill Music," *Master Class*, June 24, 2021. <<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/drill-music-guide>>



with this person, and this is where I am.’ The efficiency of releasing these songs — with their real-time taunts — leads to the violence happening.”<sup>11</sup>

Social media beefs coupled with drill rap lyrics have inflamed tensions amongst gangs and loosely formed cliques who are looking to elevate their status. As soon as a song is released which disrespects or calls out a group or individual, reaction and retaliation for this disparagement soon follow and plays out real-time in the form of violent crime.

### **Recommendations**

- Ban the manufacturing of mechanisms to convert semi-automatic firearms into fully automatic firearms and enact laws to enhance penalties for those who are found to be in the possession of the part itself, or a firearm which has been converted.
- Prohibit the sale of ghost gun kits and the manufacturing of firearms through 3-D printing.
- Reestablish the assault weapons ban and ban the sale and possession of high-capacity magazines.
- Enact penalties for those in the possession of a privately made firearm which does not include proper serial numbers.
- Require any firearms made by private citizens or hobbyists to have a serial number on all parts in order for them to be traced.
- Make use of Community Violence Interrupters/Intervention (CVI) Teams to negotiate ceasefire and truces between members of rival gangs, rap groups, or neighborhood cliques to stop violent crime before it begins.
- Enforce existing gun laws to their fullest extent to ensure justice to victims of gun violence.
- Completely close the boyfriend loophole, which will prohibit abusing dating partners from having guns if previously convicted of domestic abuse. Homicides committed by those in dating partnerships have steadily increased for three decades and have led to women being killed by dating partners as much as by spouses.<sup>12</sup>
- Increase funding to US Attorney’s Offices to take on additional federal adoption cases, but not by decreasing funding to existing police budgets and line items.
- Increase the number of Senate-confirmed US Attorneys. Currently, almost 60% of districts in the United States do not have a Senate-confirmed US Attorney in place.

## **Juvenile Offenders**

Most MCCA member agencies have reported dramatic increases in juvenile crime. The COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly contributed to the rise in juvenile crime as schools were closed, in-person community, sports and educational programs were placed on hold, and unprecedented familial and home challenges were endured. Further, the lack of accountability in terms of lenient laws and charging decisions made by local prosecutors and district attorneys make it increasingly difficult to hold juveniles accountable. MCCA agencies are reporting that juvenile offenders have and continue to build lengthy records leaving many major cities with preventable tragedies and an increase in both juvenile and adult crime victims.

<sup>11</sup> “Inside drill rap, the ultra-violent genre NYC’s mayor wants to shut down,” *New York Post*, February 16, 2022. <<https://nypost.com/2022/02/16/inside-drill-rap-the-genre-nycs-mayor-wants-to-shut-down/>>

<sup>12</sup> “What is the ‘boyfriend loophole’?” *Everytown For Gun Safety*, July 29, 2020. <<https://www.everytown.org/what-is-the-boyfriend-loophole/>>

## **Increase in Juvenile Trigger Pullers**

Juveniles are finding easier access to firearms either through unsafe storage practices, theft from vehicles or residences, or through gang-related activities. In many cases, due to lenient laws governing how juveniles can be held accountable, criminal organizations and gangs are recruiting them to be the trigger pullers, move narcotics, steal cars, and perform other nefarious activities.

In Cleveland, in October 2020, 17-year-old Tamara McLoyd, along with her accomplices, committed a robbery of a 37-year-old man. She was placed on probation for this offense and while on probation in January 2022, McLoyd shot and killed an off-duty Cleveland police officer then carjacked his car. She has also been suspected in other armed robberies throughout the Cleveland area.<sup>13</sup>

## **Carjackings by Juveniles**

It was recently reported that 60% of carjackings in the city of Chicago are carried out by juveniles. Chicago Police Superintendent David Brown explained that the juvenile justice system in the city has not held children accountable, and therefore, their actions have continued. In one instance, a 14-year-old held a 53-year-old at gunpoint to take his vehicle.<sup>14</sup>

The intersection of violent activities such as carjackings mixed with firearms illustrates just how dangerous the behavior of juveniles can be. In the city of Milwaukee, it was reported that there had been a 2500% increase in Kia and Hyundai vehicle thefts year-over-year.<sup>15</sup> Many of these thefts were shepherded by groups of juveniles who through the use of social media, made the criminal activity a game by which they would accumulate points for street credibility. They are known by the moniker 'The Kia Boys' and have even taunted police in messages left on stolen cars to "catch us if you can." In 2021, Milwaukee saw over 10,000 vehicles stolen in total.<sup>16</sup>

## **Recommendations**

- Invest in juvenile programming, treatment, and detention facilities which focus on early-intervention to prevent subsequent deviant behavior and arrests.
- Hold those who recruit juveniles to commit crimes responsible for their actions.
- Work with juvenile-focused community intervention teams to engage juveniles who are at high-risk of committing crimes or have demonstrated a predisposition toward violent or criminal behavior.
- Develop programs, such as police athletic leagues, which are designed to mentor juveniles and build trust and legitimacy between the police and youth.
- Utilize Community Violence Interrupters/Intervention (CVI) Teams specifically to influence juveniles, tailor messaging that is appropriate to, and employ early intervention methods to deter juveniles from being involved in crime.

<sup>13</sup> "Suspect in Cleveland officer's slaying was on probation in Lorain County Juvenile Court," *The Chronicle*, January 5, 2022.

<<https://chroniclet.com/news/287336/suspect-in-cleveland-officers-slaying-was-on-probation-in-lorain-county-juvenile-court>>

<sup>14</sup> "Chicago's top cop says 60 percent of carjacking suspects are juveniles," *Fox 6 Milwaukee*, February 15, 2022.

<<https://www.fox6now.com/news/chicagos-top-cop-says-60-percent-of-carjacking-suspects-are-juveniles>>

<sup>15</sup> "Thefts of Kia, Hyundai explode 2,500% in Milwaukee," *ABC 2 WISN*, June 17, 2021. <<https://www.wisn.com/article/thefts-of-kia-hyundai-explode-2500-in-milwaukee/36756668#>>

<sup>16</sup> "Car Thieves Taunt Milwaukee Police in Note: Catch Us If You Can," *Officer.com*, January 12, 2022. <<https://www.officer.com/vehicles-fleet/vehicles-equipment/auto-theft-prevention/video/21252897/car-thieves-taunt-milwaukee-police-in-note-catch-us-if-you-can>>

## **Prosecutorial and Judicial Accountability**

The criminal justice system consists of three different branches designed to maintain integrity through a series of checks and balances. Law enforcement is just one part of the system designed to hold criminals accountable. Prosecutors and district attorneys, as well as judges, are integral in the overall structure. No one branch should have more weight than others, but all three should be equal and work together in the pursuit of justice for victims.

Recently, concerning shifts in the criminal justice system have left the overall system unbalanced. Bail reform is one of the most significant and contentious elements of the current criminal justice reform debate. We are all familiar with the inequity of holding pre-trial offenders in jail simply because of their socioeconomic status and inability to make bail. Common sense reform is needed to provide relief to non-violent offenders who pose a minimal risk to public safety. Reform is achievable, but we have seen local government and activist efforts across this nation take it too far.

The theory that many activists subscribe to is the proposition that it is unconstitutional to hold offenders, even murder suspects, pre-conviction. The promulgation of this position runs contrary to common sense and comes at the expense of community safety. Judges must have the ability to remand into custody dangerous individuals, so they do not have the ability to cause further harm to victims, intimidate witnesses, and continue to threaten the public. Our nation must inject transparency into the prosecutorial and judicial components of the criminal justice system to afford the American people the opportunity to hold elected district attorneys and judges accountable for their actions. Below are a few illustrative examples of individuals who have been released pre-trial only to continue preying on local communities:

A convicted sex offender who was out on bond for continuous sexual abuse of a child in Harris County was arrested for murder and kidnapping in southwest Louisiana. He has been accused of shooting and killing a 17-year-old girl, 18-year-old boy, and kidnapping a 14-year-old.

In New York City, a career criminal was being held on bail for skipping a court date in a grand larceny and criminal possession of stolen property case prior to being released pre-trial. Since his release, he has been rearrested for burglarizing a newsstand, 4 separate drug offenses, and a grand larceny where he snatched the purse of a 70-year-old elderly female. He was only able to continue his crime spree because despite his lengthy criminal history, he was repeatedly released pre-trial after being arrested for each of these additional offenses.

Washington D.C. does not have a bond system and arrestees are only held if they are dangerous and/or a flight risk. The bar to hold arrestees is very high and oftentimes the decision on whether or not an individual should be released is based on the underlying charge without considering the individual's criminal history. As of May 2020, there were 23 people accused of gun related homicides on pretrial release in the District. Data on shootings in the District supports the notion that not enough gun/violent offenders are being held. Compared to the same period last year, there has been a 17% increase in number of shootings and a 31% increase in gun related homicides.

In April 2022, a shooting occurred at a shopping mall in Columbia, South Carolina. Nine individuals were shot and five were trampled in the chaos of the event. The suspect was given \$25,000 bond, house arrest with ankle monitoring, and was allowed to go to and from work once he was released. The suspect had previously been charged with accessory before the fact in a June 2018 homicide of a 17-year-old. Sheriff Leon Lott of the Richland County Sheriff's Office expressed his frustration with the system allowing this suspect to be free. "We catch people, they serve a little bit of time, they get out and they get right back doing what they normally do and that's commit crimes. The criminal justice system needs to do better."<sup>17</sup>

Antonio 'ESPN' Yarger, Jr., a 7-year-old of Erie, Pennsylvania, was shot and killed on April 14, 2022. Abdullah Ismael, a 17-year-old, and Yassin Ibrahim, a 19-year-old, were charged in the 7-year-old's death. Regrettably, Ismael was out on bond stemming from a March 2021 shooting incident which alleges he shot into an occupied gas station resulting in an injury of a 16-year-old. While Ismael is a juvenile, he has proven himself no less dangerous resulting in the tragic loss of a 7-year-old child.<sup>18</sup>

These are just a few of many examples taking place each day across the country. While it is not efficient for our criminal justice system to be burdened with non-violent offenders, we need to ensure those who are given bail have the proper guardrails and are without violent histories. Letting out violent individuals with criminal histories has proven itself to be disastrous and has led to the criminal justice system producing an environment which generates more victims instead of safer cities.

The frustration over decisions made by some district attorneys was recently reflected in the successful recall referendum of the San Francisco District Attorney Chesa Boudin. Over 60% of voters were in favor of recalling District Attorney Boudin after many controversies, including his handling of major shoplifting incidents as well as hate crimes committed against Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>19</sup>

Harris County, Texas filed 407 capital murder charges against individuals between September 2016 and September 2021. Of the 407 suspects charged, 113 were able to bond out, and 30 of them committed additional crimes while out on bond, including homicide, robbery, assault, drug, and weapons charges, evading arrest, and possession of child pornography.<sup>20</sup> This equates to roughly 25% percent of the individuals released on bond.

From May 2018 through January 2021, Harris County, Texas, saw 90 men, women, and children killed where the perpetrator was out on felony bond. In 64 of these incidents, the victim was shot with a firearm. The age range of all these victims spread from three unborn children to 80-

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<sup>17</sup> "Suspected South Carolina Mall Shooter Released on Bail," *National Review*, April 18, 2022. <<https://www.nationalreview.com/news/suspected-south-carolina-mall-shooter-released-on-bail>>

<sup>18</sup> "17-year-old charged in Erie boy's killing was out on bond in another shooting," *GoErie.com*, May 2, 2022. <<https://www.goerie.com/story/news/crime/2022/05/02/erie-man-teen-charged-fatal-shooting-7-year-old-antonio-espn-yarger-jr/65353062007>>

<sup>19</sup> "San Francisco outs liberal DA Chesa Boudin in heated recall," *Associated Press*, June 8, 2022. <<https://apnews.com/article/2022-california-primary-san-francisco-district-attorney-29f92d448a0281fd6d8e647e4edb3ede>>

<sup>20</sup> "Here's how many capital murder suspects bond out of jail and get arrested again," *KHOU11.com*, December 14, 2021. <<https://www.khou.com/article/news/investigations/capital-murder-suspects-bonding-out-of-jail/285-828fb5f0-dede-4a7e-97f7-df30bf2207f9>>

years-old.<sup>21</sup> While there have been some successful changes to the bond system, these alarming statistics prove that many cities need reform to prevent these unnecessary tragedies from occurring.

To address the current shortfalls in the bail system, each offender must undergo an individualized risk assessment to determine their pre-trial status. Such an assessment would indicate if an individual is low risk and should be released pre-trial, as well as help to identify potential flight risks who may require additional conditions, such as electronic monitoring, home confinement, or supervised release.

Public safety decisions should not be political. Rather, they need to be transparent and based on science and evidence. Far too often we have seen judges and prosecutors who view themselves as reformers and social justice advocates make decisions based upon political opinions and biases, and not on what is best to ensure the safety of the American people.

### **Recommendations**

- Evaluate state statutes and local ordinances regarding bail and ensure the laws enacted are being implemented properly and that public safety is not being compromised.
- Implement a pre-trial risk assessment that considers the crime(s) committed, public safety threat posed, the proclivity to reoffend, risk of flight, and criminal history.
- Encourage all three branches of the criminal justice system to communicate regularly on any concerns within the community. This communication should include members of law enforcement, the judicial branch, as well as those who make prosecutorial decisions.
- Law enforcement, judges, and prosecutors should regularly meet with victim advocacy groups and listen to their concerns, especially to those who have been victimized by individuals who were out on bail or bond restrictions.
- Where appropriate, enact public policies which hold criminals accountable, but allow those with non-violent offenses to be given alternatives to incarceration. Further, enacting smart bail policies which do not burden those without financial means, yet still holds the most violent criminals accountable is necessary.

## **Responsible Gun Ownership**

Countless lives are lost every single year due to irresponsible gun ownership. While the right to bear arms is promulgated by the Constitution of the United States, it comes with the extreme responsibility to ensure firearm ownership does not lead to unnecessary violence or death. In 2020, the leading cause of death for juveniles in the United States was firearm-related incidents surpassing both car accidents and drug overdoses. Between 2019 and 2020, firearm-related gun violence deaths increased 13% nationally, but for those between the ages of 1 to 19, it increased over 30%.<sup>22</sup> Using common sense tactics to secure and lock-up these weapons has the potential of preventing these avoidable deaths both to protect children with suicidal ideations, but also from using these firearms in acts of violent crime.

<sup>21</sup> "Bond Reform Victim's Report," *Crime Stoppers of Houston*, January 2021. <<https://crime-stoppers.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Bond-Reform-Victims-Report-as-of-1-2021.pdf>>

<sup>22</sup> "Guns Became the Leading Cause of Death for American Children and Teens in 2020," *TIME.com*, April 27, 2022. <<https://time.com/6170864/cause-of-death-children-guns/>>



Further, the volume of stolen guns used in crimes continues to increase due to firearms being taken from vehicles and through home invasions. Leaving a firearm in a vehicle, whether it is locked or unlocked, is incredibly irresponsible and has resulted in a flood of firearms on the streets which are, in turn, used in crimes. In Cleveland, during the month of April 2022, a firearm was stolen almost once a day from both locked and unlocked vehicle.<sup>23</sup>

Following several senseless shootings of children due to unsecured handguns in 2021, the Detroit Police Department partnered with Project Childsafe funded through the National Shooting Sports Foundation to give away gun locks at their police precincts.<sup>24</sup> Many major cities across the country partner with this organization and others to encourage citizens to safely secure and store their firearms.



*The Detroit Police Department distributes gun locks and safe firearm storage information at a community event.  
Photo Courtesy: Detroit Police Department*

## Recommendations

- Partner with responsible gun ownership organizations, such as Project ChildSafe, which is a program run by the National Shooting Sports Foundation and promotes the safe storage of firearms through education and free firearm safety kits.<sup>25</sup>
- Distribute free gun locks at community events.
- Encourage the use of gun safes that can be locked and inaccessible to minors.
- Engage in public awareness campaigns about proper gun storage and the dangers of leaving a firearm in a vehicle whether it is locked or unlocked.
- Enact legislation that penalizes those who partake in unsafe gun storage practices and hold them accountable when a person is injured or killed by the irresponsible actions.

<sup>23</sup> "Columbus police 'absolutely alarmed' about trend of stolen guns from cars," *CBS WBNS 10*, April 19, 2022. <<https://www.10tv.com/article/news/crime-tracker/columbus-police-absolutely-alarmed-about-trend-stolen-guns-cars>>

<sup>24</sup> "Detroit police's Project Childsafe gives out free gun locks," *Fox 2 Detroit*, February 17, 2021. <<https://www.fox2detroit.com/news/detroit-polices-project-child-safe-gives-out-free-gun-locks>>

<sup>25</sup> <<https://projectchildsafe.org>>

## **Victims of Gun Violence and Community Impacts**

Statistics and narratives often focus on the criminal aspect of violent crime, but often omit the effects of gun violence on both victims and the community as a whole. Each time a trigger is pulled it generates a ripple effect of fear and trauma for the victim, the victim's family, and the witnesses involved. Whether or not the person is actually struck by the bullet, being the intended target of a gun crime has lasting effects that can forever change an individual. The victims of gun violence suffer trauma which affects their emotional, physical, and financial well-being, and these aspects need to be better addressed by the criminal justice and mental health system, as well as by the government, in order to direct adequate funding to address these markers of trauma.

Shootings, whether or not they result in a homicide or injury, are traumatic incidents for all parties involved. Trauma for shooting victims and witnesses is an ongoing issue, which is rarely addressed or discussed when examining gun violence. A survey of gun violence victims conducted by Everytown, which was released in February 2022, demonstrated that nine out of ten victims of gun violence experience trauma. Two-thirds of those surveyed expressed the need for assistance with mental health services, therapy, and support. One-third of victims also expressed the need for legal assistance and financial assistance to pay for funeral and burial costs.<sup>26</sup>

All areas of the criminal justice system need to be cognizant of these complex traumas which victims and survivors of gun violence experience. Care and patience need to be exercised from the very first interview conducted by law enforcement while still on-scene of the event until the case is adjudicated but must also continue after the case is settled as trauma will likely continue for the duration of a survivor's life.

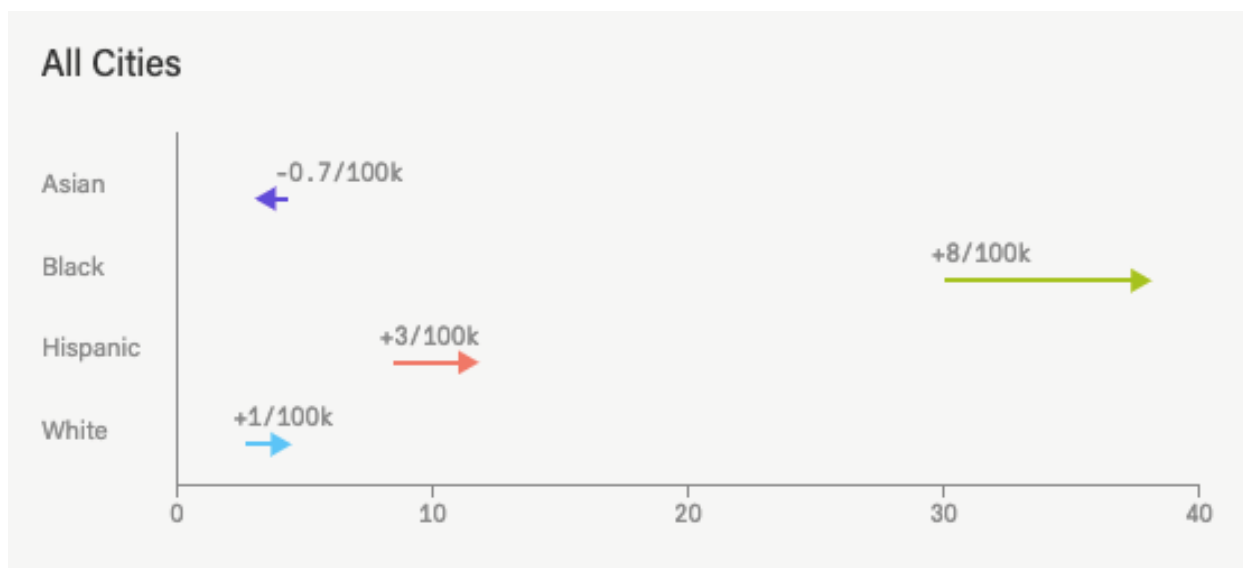
Further, as reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in May 2022, people of color tend to be victims of gun violence at a higher rate than those of other demographics. African American males between the ages of 10 and 44 have the highest rates of homicide involving a firearm.<sup>27</sup> Using data from nine major US cities which include Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Dallas, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC, the total of homicides between these cities rose by 722 from 2019 to 2020. Distressingly, 85% of these increases in homicides occurred in predominately African American and Hispanic neighborhoods.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> When the Shooting Stops: The Impact of Gun Violence on Survivors in America," *Everytown*, February 3, 2022. <<https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-survivors-in-america>>

<sup>27</sup> "Firearm Deaths Grow, Disparities Widen," *CDC.Gov*, May 10, 2022. <<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2022/s0510-vs-firearm-deathrates.html>>

<sup>28</sup> "Murders Rose Last Year: Black and Hispanic Neighborhoods Were Hit Hardest," *The Marshall Project*, April 8, 2021. <<https://www.themarshallproject.org/2021/04/08/murders-rose-last-year-black-and-hispanic-neighborhoods-were-hit-hardest>>



*The above chart depicts the increases in the homicide rate in Black and Hispanic neighborhoods in Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Dallas, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC from 2019-2020.*  
*Source: The Marshall Project*

The Metropolitan Police Department in Washington, DC employs a Victim Specialists Unit which responds to critical incidents and provides support, information, and referrals to victims and survivors as well as their families. Their goal is to provide support, but also act to connect victims to services seamlessly and empower them throughout what can be a traumatic process. This unit ensures victims are treated in a respectful, responsive, and compassionate manner. Their work begins as soon as a violent crime occurs and they continue to provide the victims with the tools, means, and encouragement needed to allow victims and survivors to cope in a dignified and safe manner.<sup>29</sup>

### Recommendations

- Develop resources to address trauma in victims and survivors which includes recognizing their needs at the beginning, during, and after the case has made its way through the criminal justice system.
- Partner with community organizations and build relationships with them so their resources can be called upon readily when a traumatic crime occurs. These organizations should include, but not be limited to, local mental health services, legal aid, financial services, funeral homes, faith-based aid, domestic violence shelters, and victim advocacy groups.
- Law enforcement agencies must invest in investigative training which is trauma-forward focused. When officers comprehend what occurs when an individual experiences trauma, including understanding the changes in a person's brain chemistry, it leads to better outcomes for the investigation and also for the victims and survivors.
- Recognize that trauma is occurring not only for the victims, but also for the officers and medical staff responding to these critical incidents. Regular check-ins and peer-to-peer offerings should be developed and used on a regular basis.
- Acknowledge communities of color are being affected by gun violence at a higher rate than other areas, and tailor resources, outreach, and strategies to support these critical

<sup>29</sup> "About MPD: Victim Specialist Unit," MPDC.DC.gov. <<https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/victim-specialists-unit>>

areas. Further, agencies must use policing methods which build trust and relationships with victims, and also encourage a culture where witnesses share information with investigators to solve crime and bring victims and survivors justice.

## **Mental Health Crises**

It is no secret that the United States is facing a mental health emergency. The disinvestment over the past few decades related to mental health and substance abuse care has had a profound effect on the population, and law enforcement has had to greatly change the way in which they police these vulnerable individuals. That being said, many of those individuals who are experiencing mental health crises go on to commit heinous acts of violence using firearms they may have legally purchased but are no longer able to own responsibly. While the mental health system may have failed those experiencing mental health issues, we must ensure that firearms in their possession are not used to harm themselves and others. In many cases, those who commit shootings and acts of violence with firearms in schools, workplaces, public spaces, or within their homes, were known to be experiencing severe mental health concerns yet had access to legally purchased firearms.

Adam Lanza, who murdered 20 children and 6 adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut<sup>30</sup> in December 2012, had been diagnosed with psychiatric and physical ailments which had been untreated for years.<sup>31</sup> Lanza had access to firearms which had been legally purchased by his mother, who often took him to the range to practice his marksmanship.<sup>32</sup>

Nikolas Cruz, who murdered 17 individuals at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida in February 2018, had legally purchased the firearms used in the shooting at a gun store in Florida.<sup>33</sup> Cruz had received hundreds of hours of therapy and counseling, yet was still able to slip through the cracks and purchase a firearm used to cause another school massacre.<sup>34</sup>

As these tragedies play out and take the lives of so many, it is necessary to contemplate what can be done to prevent future mass shootings. Many states across the country have enacted Extreme Risk Protection Orders, also referred to as 'red flag' laws, to temporarily confiscate firearms from those individuals who are at risk of harming themselves or others, pursuant to a court order, if a judge decides they are in crisis and represent a public safety risk. The laws include due process provisions to protect the rights of gun owners, as well as an appeal process to ensure the law is properly applied using a narrow set of guidelines.

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<sup>30</sup> "Sandy Hook Shooting Victims Remembered," *CNN.com*, December 14, 2021. < <https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/14/us/sandy-hook-shooting-victims-9th-anniversary/index.html>>

<sup>31</sup> "Adam Lanza's Mental Problems 'Completely Untreated' Before Newtown Shootings, Report Says," *New York Times*, November 21, 2014. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/22/nyregion/before-newtown-shootings-adam-lanzas-mental-problems-completely-untreated-report-says.html>>

<sup>32</sup> "How They Got Their Guns," *New York Times*, February 16, 2018. < <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/10/03/us/how-mass-shooters-got-their-guns.html>>

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> "Mental health provider had long history with Parkland shooter. Was agency negligent?," *Sun Sentinel*, January 16, 2019. < <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/parkland/florida-school-shooting/fl-ne-henderson-cruz-civil-suit-20190116-story.html>>

## Recommendations

- Provide support and technical assistance to state, tribal, and local efforts to pass legislation regarding extreme risk protection orders to remove access to firearms from individuals who are considered to be a threat to themselves or others.
- Engage in public awareness campaigns on how to identify those who may be experiencing a mental health crisis and outline ways to get them referred to the proper community mental health partners prior to a tragedy occurring.
- Continue to push out information regarding the use of the National Mental Health Crises Hotline which can connect those in crisis to service and assistance by dialing 988.
- Invest and allocate funding for Crisis Intervention Training for all first responders and implement jail diversion plans for those in crisis.
- Encourage the development of co-responder models which partner first responders with community mental health services, social workers, and/or psychologists in order to provide better service to those in need of mental health help and divert them from the criminal justice system. Taking this approach connects individuals to services and diverts them from entering into the criminal justice system which is not often equipped with providing the assistance those suffering from mental health or substance abuse issues truly need.

## Maintaining Second Amendment Integrity

At the heart of the conversation surrounding gun violence comes discussions over changes to gun laws and policies. However, this does not mean an erosion of the Second Amendment. Gun reform or changes to gun policies should not threaten the right to bear arms, as long as this right is upheld with responsibility – just as it is important to treat all Constitutional provisions with responsibility.

One-third of American gun owners report they participate in hunting involving a firearm on a regular basis and one-half of all gun owners go to a shooting range for practice with some frequency. Additionally, 25% of gun owners report they carry outside of the home ‘all or most of the time’, while 31% report they carry ‘sometimes’.<sup>35</sup> These statistics demonstrate gun-ownership in the United States and legal activities associated with their use are particularly important to many Americans. Any policies put forth must respect gun ownership for those who follow the law and do not participate in criminal activities.

## Recommendations

- Uphold the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens who properly purchase, regulate, store, and use firearms with responsibility and respect to federal, state, and local statutes as well as the United States Constitution.
- Use media opportunities and public events to encourage the practice of safe and responsible firearm ownership.
- Partner with pro-Second Amendment organizations or gun advocacy groups to find ways to ensure Americans can exercise their Second Amendment rights while guaranteeing a safe environment and community for all.

<sup>35</sup> “America’s Complex Relationship With Guns,” *Pew Research Center*, June 22, 2017. <<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2017/06/22/guns-and-daily-life-identity-experiences-activities-and-involvement>>



- Educate and train officers on the rights of citizens to bear arms to ensure that peaceful demonstrations or displays of legally owned firearms remain non-violent and un confrontational as long as all federal, state, and local laws are followed.

## **Conclusion**

There is little question over the state of gun violence in America today – and action must be taken now. In 2020, firearm-related deaths topped 45,222, which is the highest number ever recorded since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began tracking this data in 1968. The average number of homicides related to gun violence per day increased to 124 in 2020.<sup>36</sup>

Police agencies are struggling to balance recruitment and retention issues as well as dwindling budgets, they are being asked to do more with less. Proactive policing to stymie violence before it happens has been diminished as officers are being redeployed within agencies to cover vacancies. These reasons demonstrate the need for a strong criminal justice system and steadfast relationships with community partners in order to drive down gun violence and violent crime.

As discussed throughout this report, the issue of gun violence will not be solved by any one strategy, group, organization, or change to public policy. This horrifying and avoidable trend will only be diminished when the entire criminal justice system and all its community partners work together to find solutions that are appropriate for each state and local municipality. Without a complete commitment by all stakeholders, this deadly trend will continue to be an everyday occurrence in our communities across the nation. The impact of these crimes on victims and survivors runs deep but extends far beyond the families involved and truly affects the community as a whole.

The Major Cities Chiefs Association will continue to engage policymakers, leaders, and influencers within the criminal justice system to create the change and build the relationships needed to put an end to the trend of increasing gun violence. While the MCCA membership is affected each day by violent criminals with no regard for human life, the men and women who serve and lead police agencies across the country reaffirm their commitment to providing excellent service, compassion for victims, thorough investigations, and justice for victims and survivors of gun violence and all violent crime.

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<sup>36</sup> "Record: CDC records highest-ever number of gun-related deaths in 2020," *Johns Hopkins University*, May 2, 2022. <<https://hub.jhu.edu/2022/05/02/highest-number-of-gun-related-deaths-in-2020-report>>

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## **APPENDIX A**



### **Firearms Violence Policy**

Adopted by Membership Vote on May 30, 2018

*The Major Cities Chiefs Association has been a strong advocate for sensible gun policy for many years and has taken these positions on key issues.*

#### **Legislative Positions**

- Adopt Universal Background Checks for all gun sales and close both gun show and internet loopholes
- Strengthen NICS definitions of prohibited purchasers to cover all appropriate domestic violence cases, with strict judicial procedures for appeal and reinstatement
- Support “Red Flag” legislation and regulations to preclude gun purchases by mentally disturbed persons with histories of violent behavior
- Ban “bump-stock” devices that replicate fully automatic weapons fire
- Maintain ATF regulations and restrictions regarding silencers
- Reinstatement the assault weapons ban and encourage stiffer penalties for illegal guns
- Ban high-capacity magazines (10+ rounds)
- Ban internet ammo sales, require in-person transactions, records of sales and licensing of ammo vendors
- Oppose legislation that would require States to recognize any and all concealed carry permits
- Oppose legislation that further erodes ATF authority
- Prevent known terrorists from purchasing firearms and/or ammunition

#### **Policy Statements**

- Establish a strong system for universal background checks to cover all firearms purchases, with no exceptions.
- Strengthen the national criminal instant background check system. The background check system does not have complete data and measures should be undertaken to ensure comprehensive reporting. Mental health information, for example, is inadequate, inconsistent and incomplete. The NICS system must be improved.
- Encourage aggressive federal prosecution of violent offenders using guns. Conviction in Federal Court generally results in stronger sanctions, removes the offenders from the streets and serves as a deterrent.
- Encourage mandatory reporting of all purchases, transfers and stolen firearms. This measure would assist law enforcement agencies with identification, criminal investigations and recovery of stolen firearms.
- Establish harsher penalties and aggressively prosecute straw purchasers, who are responsible for putting a substantial number of guns used in criminal acts. More aggressive prosecution with strong penalties would hold them accountable and act as a deterrent.
- Court orders can and should be used to prevent purchase of firearms by persons who pose a threat to public safety
- Support and strengthen the authorities of ATF, rather than to restrict and handicap enforcement of gun laws.

## APPENDIX B



### Major Cities Chiefs Association

#### VIOLENT CRIME SURVEY – NATIONAL TOTALS

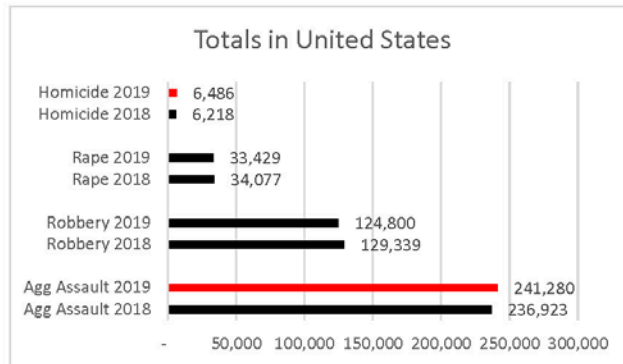
##### Year End Comparison <sup>1</sup>

January 1 to December 31, 2019 and 2018

Contact: Laura Cooper, Executive Director  
[cooper@majorcitieschiefs.com](mailto:cooper@majorcitieschiefs.com)

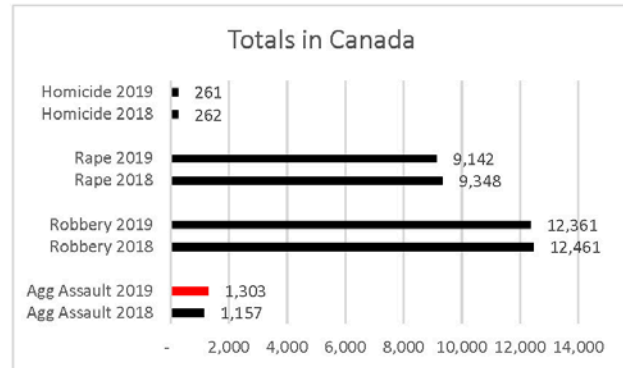
#### United States 68 of 69 Responding Agencies

United States	2019	2018
Homicide	6,486	6,218
Rape	33,429	34,077
Robbery	124,800	129,339
Aggravated Assault	241,280	236,923



#### Canada 9 of 9 Responding Agencies

Canada	2019	2018
Homicide	261	262
Sexual Assault <sup>2</sup>	9,142	9,348
Robbery	12,361	12,461
Aggravated Assault	1,303	1,157



Indicates increase from 2018 to 2019.

Update February 25, 2020

1. Data is preliminary – not a final UCR/NIBRS report.
2. Canadian definition of Sexual Assault used to determine Rape numbers for Canadian agencies except Vancouver PD.





## Major Cities Chiefs Association

### VIOLENT CRIME SURVEY – NATIONAL TOTALS

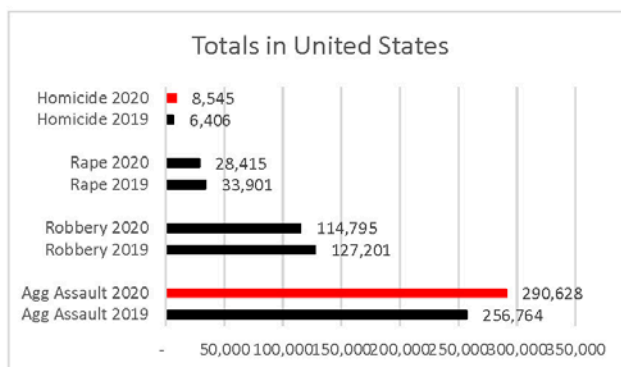
#### Year End Comparison<sup>1</sup>

January 1 to December 31, 2020 and 2019

Contact: Laura Cooper, Executive Director  
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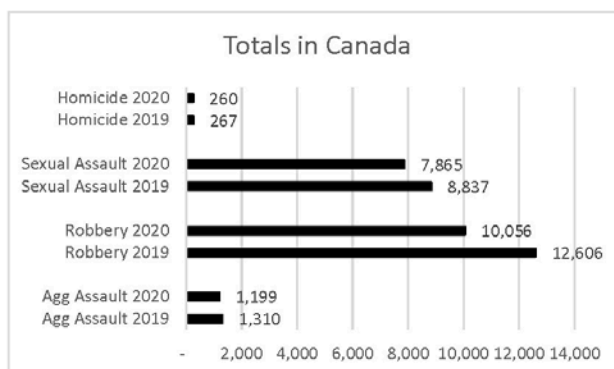
#### United States 67 of 70 Responding Agencies

United States <sup>2</sup>	2020	2019
Homicide	8,545	6,406
Rape	28,415	33,901
Robbery	114,795	127,201
Aggravated Assault	290,628	256,764



#### Canada 9 of 9 Responding Agencies

Canada <sup>3</sup>	2020	2019
Homicide	260	267
Sexual Assault	7,865	8,837
Robbery	10,056	12,606
Aggravated Assault	1,199	1,310



Indicates increase from 2019 to 2020.

Updated February 14, 2022



## Major Cities Chiefs Association

### VIOLENT CRIME SURVEY – NATIONAL TOTALS

#### Year End Comparison <sup>1</sup>

January 1 to December 31, 2021, and 2020

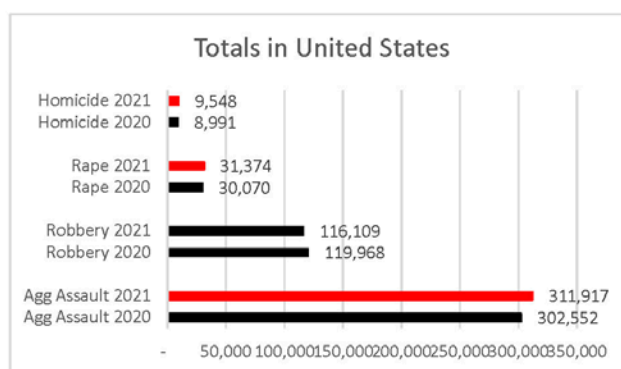
Contact: Laura Cooper, Executive Director

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#### United States

70 of 70 Responding Agencies

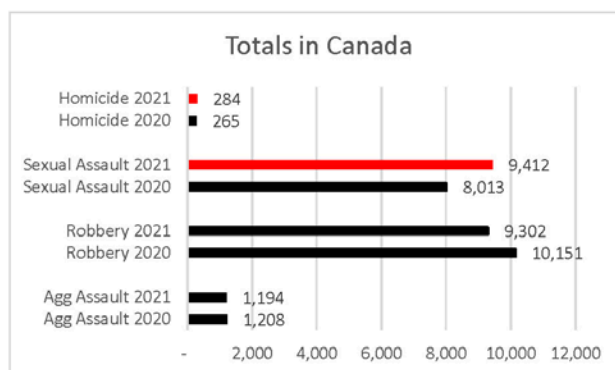
United States <sup>2</sup>	2021	2020
Homicide	9,548	8,991
Rape	31,374	30,070
Robbery	116,109	119,968
Aggravated Assault	311,917	302,552



#### Canada

9 of 9 Responding Agencies

Canada <sup>3</sup>	2021	2020
Homicide	284	265
Sexual Assault	9,412	8,013
Robbery	9,302	10,151
Aggravated Assault	1,194	1,208



Indicates increase from 2020 to 2021.

February 10, 2022



## Major Cities Chiefs Association

### VIOLENT CRIME SURVEY – NATIONAL TOTALS

#### Midyear Comparison <sup>1</sup>

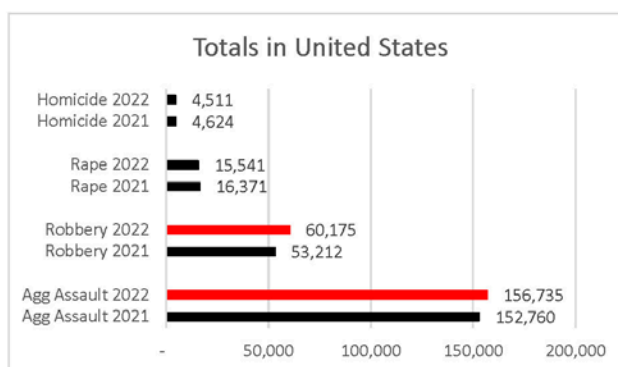
January 1 to June 30, 2022, and 2021

Contact: Laura Cooper, Executive Director, [cooper@majorcitieschiefs.com](mailto:cooper@majorcitieschiefs.com)

#### United States

70 of 70 Responding Agencies

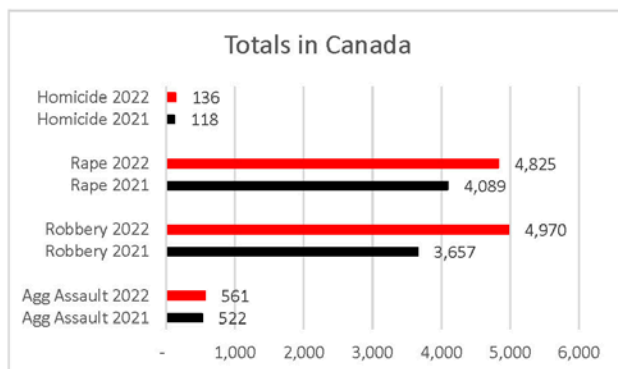
United States <sup>2</sup>	2022	2021
Homicide	4,511	4,624
Rape	15,541	16,371
Robbery	60,175	53,212
Aggravated Assault	156,735	152,760



#### Canada

9 of 9 Responding Agencies

Canada <sup>3</sup>	2022	2021
Homicide	136	118
Sexual Assault	4,825	4,089
Robbery	4,970	3,657
Aggravated Assault	561	522



Indicates increase from 2021 to 2022.

August 2, 2022