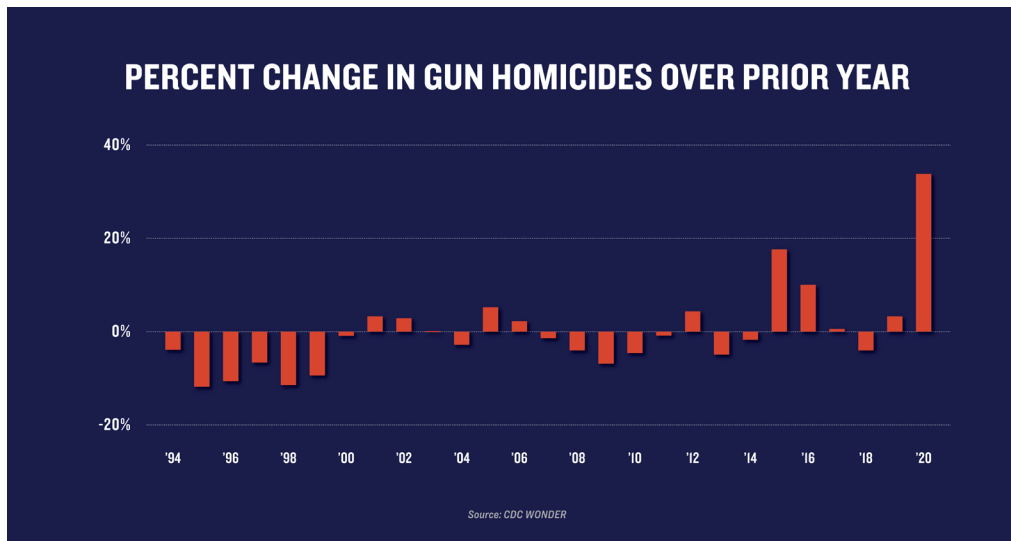


SURGING GUN VIOLENCE: WHERE WE ARE, HOW WE GOT HERE, AND WHERE WE GO NEXT

In the last two years, gun violence has skyrocketed across the country. In 2020, 19,384 people were killed in gun homicides—a 35% increase in the gun homicide rate over 2019. **This is the largest one-year increase in gun homicides on record.**

Giffords Law Center compiled data from the 50 largest US cities, finding that all but five of these cities saw an increase in homicides in 2020. At least 32 of these cities saw further increases in 2021. Importantly, our analysis suggests that while violence changed in quantity in the last two years, shootings were not qualitatively different, with the most vulnerable communities continuing to bear this crisis unequally.



Importantly, the increases in gun violence over the years are just that: increases in gun violence, but not increases in other kinds of crime. **The evidence overwhelmingly indicates that the urgent crime problem we now face is one primarily fueled by gun violence.** Our report explores the factors that likely did and didn't contribute to these historic increases, based on available evidence, and makes recommendations for how to address this unprecedented crisis.

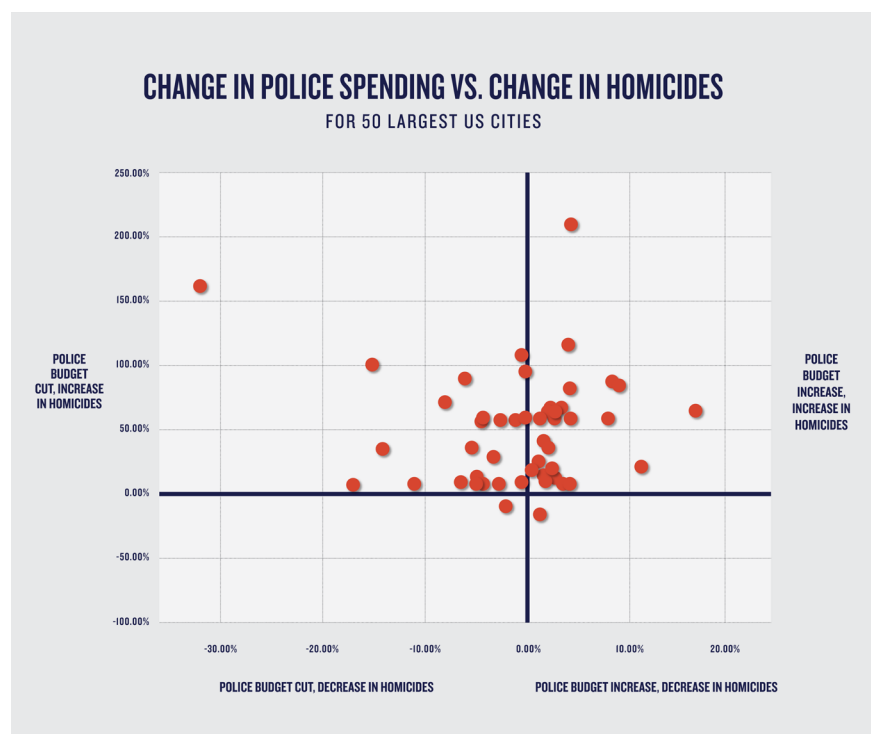
FACTORS THAT LIKELY DIDN'T CONTRIBUTE TO HISTORIC RISES IN GUN VIOLENCE

POLICE REFORM EFFORTS

Evidence shows that the reallocation of police funding and so-called “anti-police” rhetoric likely did not substantially contribute to recent increases in gun violence. There is no evidence that changes to police budgets corresponded with homicide increases, and current research indicates that reductions in police activity are not generally followed by increases in crime.

CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM CHANGES AND REFORMS

There is no evidence that changes to criminal legal systems—including declining to pursue charges or impose bail for low-level, nonviolent offenses—are substantially contributing to recent increases in gun violence. The increase in homicides and gun crime was seen across the country, in areas that imposed reforms in recent years and in areas that didn't, making it difficult to correlate these changes with increased violence. Multiple studies also confirm that criminal legal system reforms do not create public safety risk.



FACTORS THAT MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO SURGES IN GUN VIOLENCE

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL SERVICES

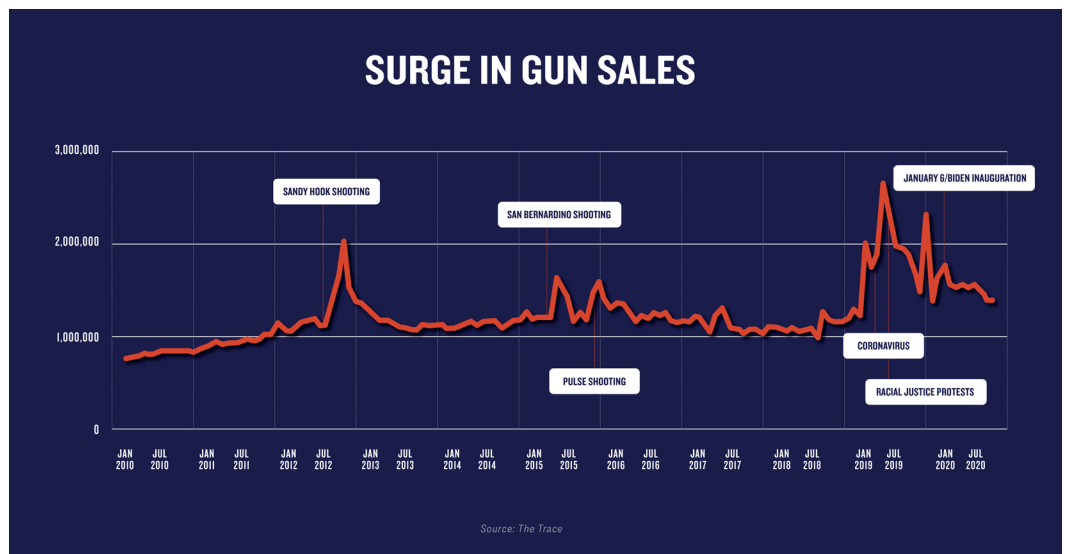
The coronavirus pandemic caused substantial social and economic disruptions in communities across the country, which may have created more opportunities for violence. People had new motivations to offend and easy targets, and were cut off from capable guardians at their schools, community centers, and work. The pandemic also prompted a sharp increase in unemployment and compounded community trauma, which may have played a role in driving increases in firearm violence.

SOCIAL UNREST RELATED TO NATIONAL RECKONING AROUND POLICING

When individuals lose trust in police to keep them safe and treat them fairly, they may be concerned about calling law enforcement to solve disputes. In turn, this can increase the likelihood that people involved in disputes will turn to retaliatory violence to solve problems, perpetuating cycles of violence. Early evidence suggests that the murder of George Floyd may have set off this cycle, with preliminary research showing reduced 911 call volume in multiple cities in the second half of 2020.

SURGE IN GUN SALES

At the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and after the murder of George Floyd, gun sales increased substantially. Overall, Americans purchased an estimated 22 million guns in 2020—an increase of nearly 65% over the previous year’s sales—and gun sales remained higher than average in 2021. Previous surges in gun purchasing have been found to lead to increases in gun violence, and some evidence suggests this may have played a role in increasing gun violence in 2020 and 2021.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The evidence is clear: cities need and deserve solutions that can help reduce gun violence now while also building an infrastructure to help prevent future spikes in violence.

1

Invest in Community Violence Intervention (CVI) Programs

In many communities, gun violence spreads much like a communicable disease: a person who is exposed to gun violence is significantly more likely to commit or be a victim of gun violence themselves. CVI programs rooted in a public health approach can be uniquely responsive to this epidemic, resulting in both relatively quick and sustained reductions in serious gun violence. Federal and state funds should be appropriated to implement and scale these lifesaving programs.

2

Implement Reforms to Promote Trust in Police

Police reforms that promote officer accountability, encourage de-escalation of high-risk incidents, and prohibit the use of excessive force provide important guardrails against police brutality and can help build community trust in law enforcement. Given that a lack of trust in police likely helped drive surges in gun violence, these reforms are critical to helping to break cycles of violence.

3

Strengthen Gun Safety Laws

The recent rises in violence have clearly shown that our current gun laws are not adequately protecting communities from surging violence. Laws that reduce easy access to firearms for people at risk of violence—including universal background checks and firearm licensing laws—are a critical foundation to prevent gun homicides and other types of gun violence.

4

Improve Gun Violence Data Collection

Tackling any public health crisis requires accurate, timely data about the scope and causes of the problem to be addressed. Expansions and upgrades of our current systems for tracking gun deaths and injuries are essential to both address current surges in violence as well as to prevent future occurrences.

We must treat this issue like the public health crisis it is, and address it with evidence-based approaches. This requires taking a serious, honest look at what is currently driving interpersonal gun violence and implementing solutions that are responsive to those factors.

As the gun violence epidemic has spiraled out of control, too many leaders have chosen to do nothing. This moment demands action—actions that can be sustained over the long term while addressing the deeply rooted conditions that account for gun violence in American cities. We must do more to mitigate these increases and protect communities in crisis.