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RESEARCH CENTER

HAMLIN UNIVERSITY

Report to the Minnesota Legislature

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About the Violence Prevention Project Research Center (VPPRC)

Mission

Violence Prevention Project Research Center is dedicated to reducing violence through research that is both accessible and geared toward action. The Center is committed to generating knowledge to enlighten and empower the public, guide practitioners, and drive informed policy decisions.

Legislative Appropriation to the Violence Prevention Project Research Center

\$500,000 each year is for a grant to the Violence Prevention Project Research Center, operating as a 501(c)(3) organization, for research focused on reducing violence in society that uses data and analysis to improve criminal justice-related policy and practice in Minnesota. Research must place an emphasis on issues related to deaths and injuries involving firearms. This is a onetime appropriation. Beginning January 15, 2025, the Violence Prevention Project Research

Center must submit an annual report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over public safety policy and finance on its work and findings. The report must include a description of the data reviewed, an analysis of that data, and recommendations to improve criminal justice-related policy and practice in Minnesota with specific recommendations to address deaths and injuries involving firearms.



Executive Director

Dr. Jillian Peterson is a Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Hamline University and director of their forensic psychology program. Jillian launched her career as a special investigator in New York City, researching the psychosocial life histories of men facing the death penalty. She earned her PhD in psychology and social behavior from the University of California, Irvine, and went on to lead large-scale research studies on mental illness and crime, mass shootings and school shootings, which have received global media attention. Jillian is a sought-after national speaker and media commentator on issues related to mental illness and violence, trauma, forensic psychology, and mass violence. She is trained in suicide prevention, crisis intervention, de-escalation, and conflict mediation.



Deputy Director

Dr. James Densley is a Professor and Department Chair of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Metro State University. Born and raised in England, James' first job in the United States was as a special education teacher in the New York City public schools. After earning his DPhil in sociology from the University of Oxford, he established himself as one of the world's leading experts on street gangs and serious youth violence, including violence online. James is the author or editor of 11 books and over 150 journal articles, book chapters, essays, and other works. He has been an invited or plenary speaker on four continents.



Executive Summary

In the past year, the Violence Prevention Project Research Center (VPPRC) has made significant strides in understanding and addressing gun violence through a range of research initiatives. Our work spans national and Minnesota-focused surveys, data analysis on firearm safety practices, the implementation of Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPO), and detailed studies on the shifting nature of homicides in the Twin Cities.

Key Findings

1 Gun Violence Exposure Survey

A representative national and Minnesota survey revealed that nearly half of Minnesotans fear being shot in a public place. Gun violence exposure was found to disproportionately affect Black men and younger generations, with significant mental health impacts reported by survivors.

2 Safe Storage of Firearms

Despite owning more guns, Minnesotans report higher rates of safe firearm storage compared to the national average. However, nearly one in five firearm owners still fail to store their guns safely, emphasizing the need for continued education and intervention.

3 Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPO) in Minnesota

In its first nine months, Minnesota's ERPO law was used primarily by law enforcement to prevent gun-related harm. While the data show the law is being used effectively, increased training and awareness are needed, particularly in urban areas like Minneapolis and St. Paul.

In addition to these research projects, the VPPRC has strengthened its community partnerships, hosted events to engage the public, and disseminated findings through various media outlets and publications. Our work continues to inform policy and practice with the goal of reducing gun violence and improving public safety.

4 The Changing Nature of Homicide in the Twin Cities

Homicide rates in the Twin Cities surged following the murder of George Floyd, with most incidents occurring on the street and involving firearms. Our ongoing collaboration with the University of Minnesota is using geospatial analysis to explore the role of reduced policing and school closures in this increase.

5 New and Updated Databases

We have expanded and updated our databases on mass shootings, K-12 school homicides, and homicides at higher education institutions and houses of worship. These tools will support further research and provide valuable insights into the patterns and drivers of gun-related violence.



Data-Driven Recommendations for Reducing Gun Violence in Minnesota

- **Providing clinicians with training and resources** to counsel patients on safe storage of firearms, along with distributing safety devices.
- **Expand training on Extreme Risk Protection Orders** across the state to ensure law enforcement officers, judges, physicians, and mental health practitioners understand when and how to use the law. Fund evaluation research that includes interviews with officers and judges to identify challenges in ERPO implementation.
- **Increase funding for mental health support** for groups most impacted by exposure to gun violence. Providing funding for school-based mental health programs for young people.
- **Fund interventions** that address the root causes of instability such as housing insecurity, unemployment, and mental health issues.
- **Fund suicide prevention programming** in schools, workplaces, houses of worship, and in higher education.
- **Fund programming that focuses on future planning** for young people, such as mentorship programs, that serve as a mitigation strategy for serious violence.
- **Fund universal trauma screening** and trauma intervention in elementary school to prevent the pathway to violence.
- **Mandate and fund anonymous reporting systems** in schools and multidisciplinary intervention teams that provide individualized support and follow-up for students in crisis.
- **Fund security planning for outdoor spaces** such as parking lots, sports fields, and playgrounds at schools, houses of worship, and places of higher education.
- **Fund dispute resolution training** and conflict resolution training for K-12 and higher education students and staff.
- **Restricting gun carrying** on K-12 school and higher education campuses
- **Colleges and universities should provide enhanced support and resources** for victims of domestic violence should include confidential reporting mechanisms, counseling services, and emergency housing. Religious leaders should be trained to recognize signs of domestic abuse and providing them with resources to effectively intervene and support survivors.



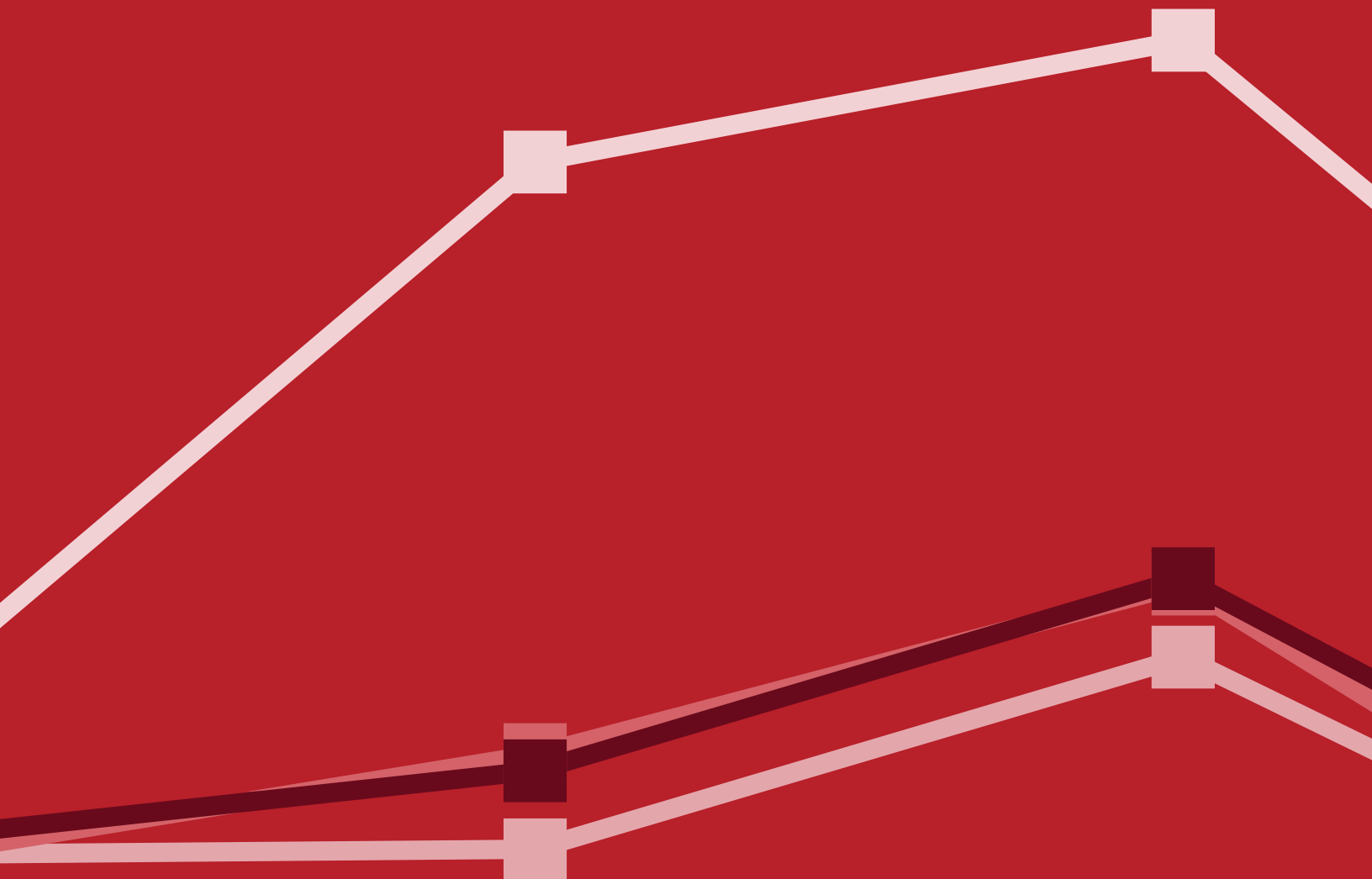
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Research Project

1

Survey on Gun Violence Exposure

National and Minnesota Findings



Research Project 1

Survey on Gun Violence Exposure: National and Minnesota Findings

In January 2024, the Violence Prevention and Policy Research Center (VPPRC), in collaboration with Professor David Pyrooz from the University of Colorado, Boulder, partnered with YouGov, an online market research firm, to conduct a nationwide survey of 10,000 adults. The primary objective of this study was to examine the extent of exposure to gun violence in the United States and assess how people have responded to it.

Key Findings: National Sample

- **Mass Shooting Exposure:** 7% of respondents reported being present at the scene of a mass shooting at some point in their lives. Physical injuries from mass shootings—such as being shot, trampled, or injured in other ways—were reported by 2.2%.
- **Generational Differences:** Older generations, including the Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964), were significantly less likely to report having experienced a mass shooting compared to younger generations, namely Millennials (born 1981–1996) and Gen Z (born after 1997), despite having lived through a longer period of risk.
- **Gender Disparities:** Men were 55% more likely than women to report having been present at a mass shooting and 89% more likely to report having been injured in one.

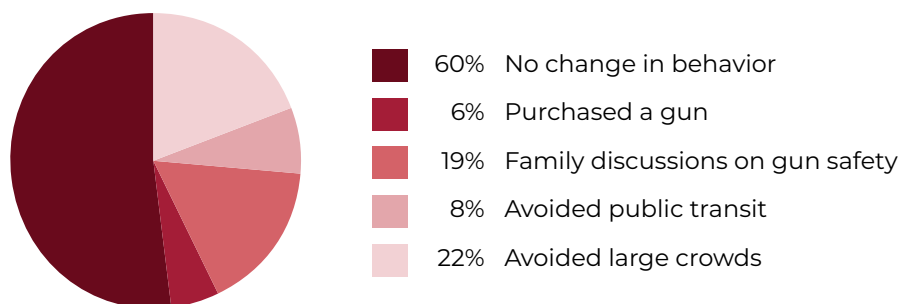
Notable Mass Shootings in Memory

When asked to name the first mass shooting that came to mind during their lifetime:

- 35% of respondents cited the 1999 Columbine High School massacre.
- Other notable responses included the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting (10%), the 2018 Parkland High School shooting (5%), the 2022 Robb Elementary School shooting in Uvalde, Texas (2%), and the 2017 Las Vegas shooting (2%).
- Among Generation X respondents, 52% named Columbine, compared to only 8% of Gen Z respondents.

Personal Behavioral Changes After Mass Shootings

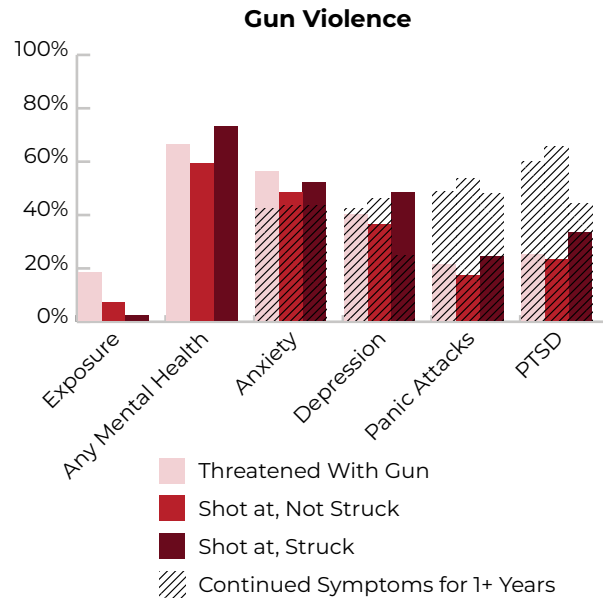
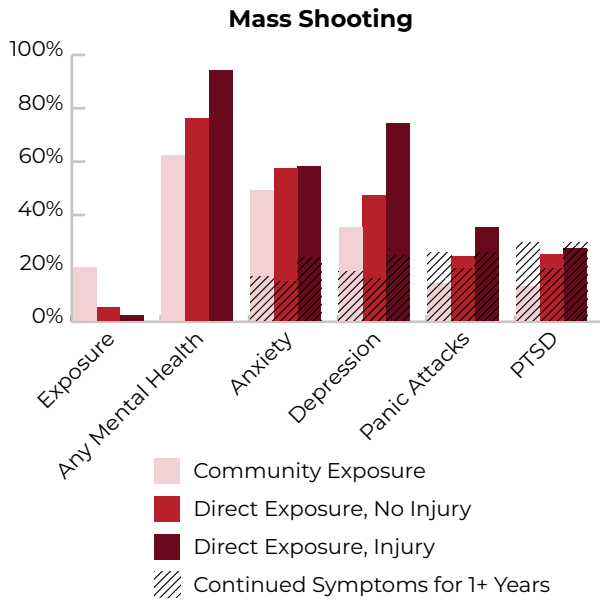
Many individuals reported changes in their behavior after a mass shooting event, including:



Mental Health Impacts of Gun Violence Exposure

Gun violence exposure, particularly in mass shootings or community violence, has lasting mental health consequences. Respondents commonly reported symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). For instance:

Two-thirds of those who experienced PTSD after being threatened with a gun continued to suffer from it years later.



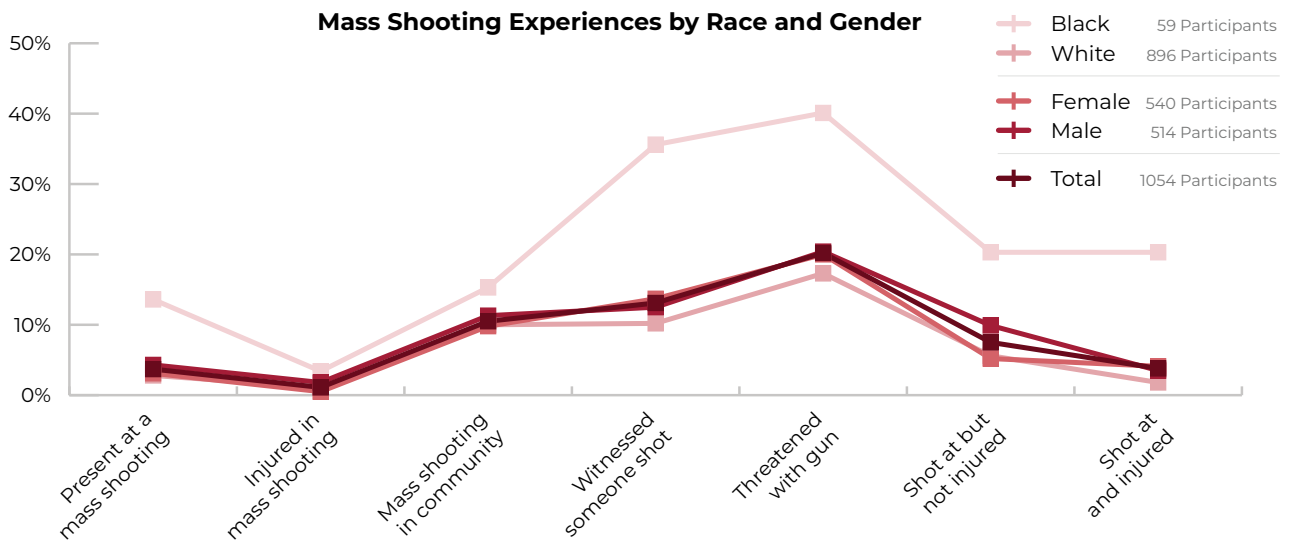
Minnesota-Specific Findings

In addition to the national survey, we conducted a representative survey of 1,054 Minnesotans. The sample closely mirrors the state's population:

- 33% of respondents were from Hennepin and Ramsey counties.
- 51.2% of respondents were female, and 48.8% were male.
- The racial breakdown was 85% White, 6% Black, 2.3% Hispanic, and 3% Asian American.

Key findings include:

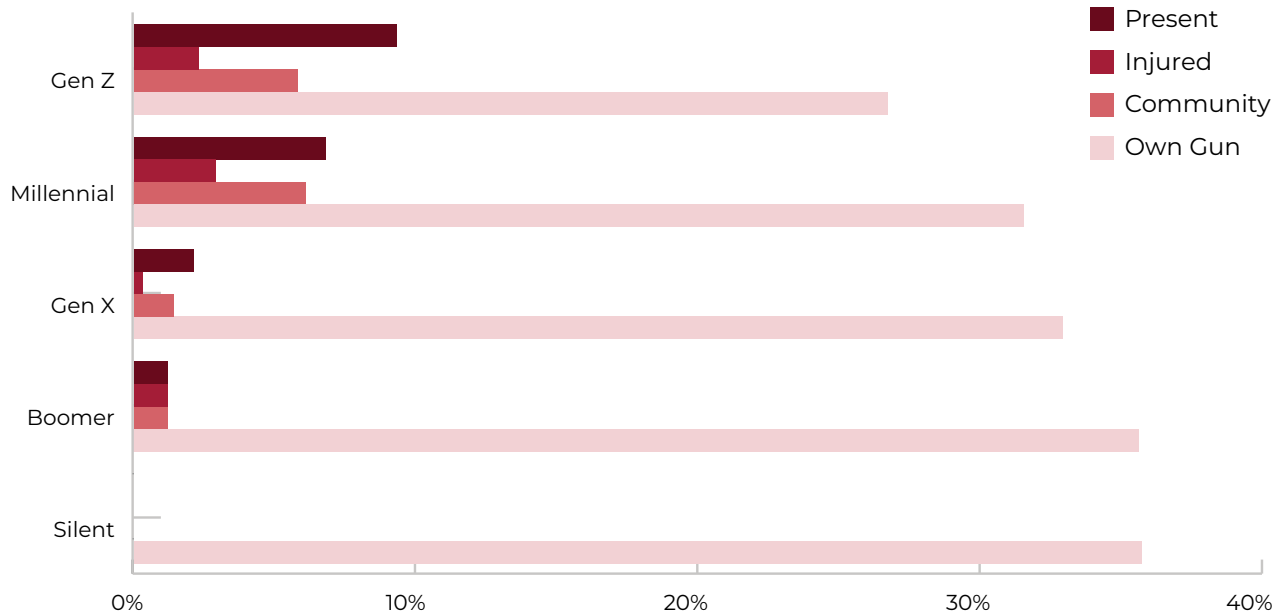
- **Fear of Gun Violence:** Nearly half of Minnesotans (47.3%) reported fearing they could be shot in a public place.
- **Black Men and Gun Violence:** Black men in Minnesota reported significantly higher rates of gun violence exposure across all categories compared to White respondents.





Generational Breakdown of Exposure in Minnesota

Like the national trends, younger generations in Minnesota reported higher exposure to mass shootings:



Our new data make one thing clear:

Gun violence is not someone else’s problem—it’s all of ours.

It affects people in rural communities, in cities, and in suburbs. It crosses generational lines and racial boundaries. And while the solutions are complex, there are immediate steps we can take to address this crisis. For one, safe storage practices could help prevent many tragedies. While nearly one-third of Minnesotans report owning a gun, only two-thirds of gun owners report consistently storing their firearms safely. The data show safe storage counseling, along with providing locks and safes, can be an effective preventative measure to reduce accidents and thefts that put guns in the hands of children or prohibited persons.

Our data further highlight the need for mental health resources, particularly for those who have been exposed to or affected by gun violence. Preventative mental health services, crisis intervention, and ongoing support for those who’ve been impacted by gun violence are essential for Minnesota’s recovery and resilience.

At the heart of this crisis is a collective call for action. Gun violence has touched far too many lives in Minnesota, and its ripple effects—on safety, mental health, and community well-being—are undeniable. The data are stark, but also offer a path forward. Addressing this issue requires both individual responsibility and broader societal commitment.



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Research Project

2

Safe Storage of Firearms



Research Project 2

Safe Storage of Firearms

National and Minnesota Survey Results

As part of our national and Minnesota surveys, we asked respondents about firearm ownership and storage practices. Nationally, 27% of adults report owning a gun. Of these gun owners, 37% own one firearm, while 63% own more than one. The most common reason for owning a gun is personal protection (64.2%), followed by hunting (10.7%).

Gun ownership trends showed that gun owners tend to be older and male, with 35% of men owning a gun compared to 20% of women. There was also a political divide: 40% of Republicans reported owning a gun, compared to 15% of Democrats.

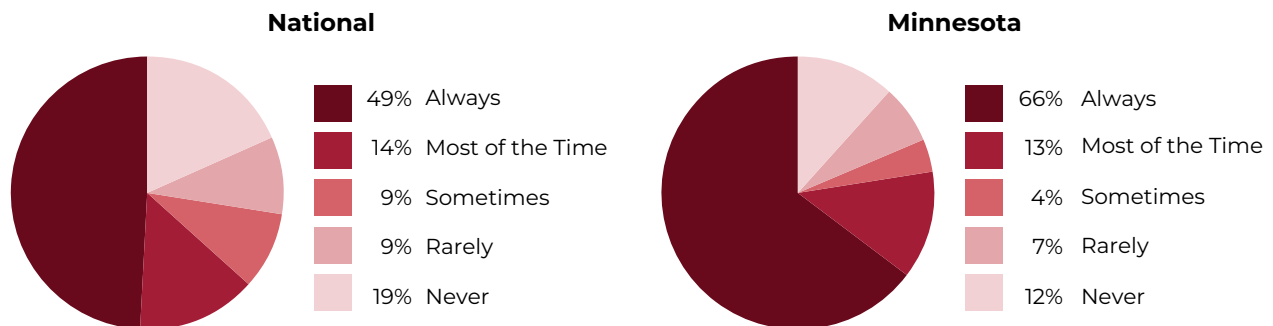
Racial differences in gun ownership were notable:

- 32% of White respondents reported owning a gun.
- Native American respondents followed at 26%.
- Black respondents (17%), Hispanic respondents (16%), and Asian respondents (10%) were less likely to own a gun.

Safe Storage Practices: National and Minnesota Comparisons

We asked gun owners how often they store their firearms locked and unloaded when not in use. Nationally, about half of gun owners always store their firearms safely, while Minnesotans reported higher levels of safe storage.

Safe Storage Practices



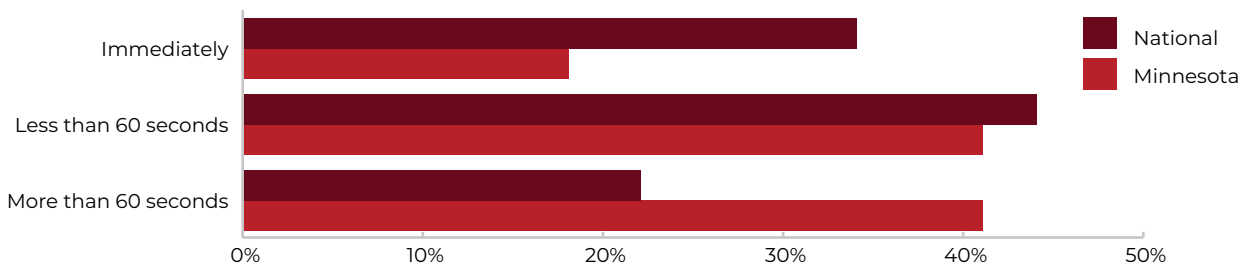
While nearly one-third of Minnesotans report owning a gun, only two-thirds of gun owners report consistently storing their firearms safely. Minnesotans are more likely than the national sample to own guns for hunting (28.2% vs. 10.7%) and are also more likely to store their firearms safely.

Firearm Readiness

We also asked respondents how quickly they could access their firearm in an emergency, such as during the middle of the night. Minnesotans were less likely to have a gun immediately available, further indicating safe storage practices.



Firearm Readiness



Demographic Differences in Safe Storage

Nationally, men are more likely than women to “never or rarely” store their firearms safely (31% vs. 23%), and less likely to “always” store them safely (44% vs. 57%).

For gun owners with children under 18 in the home, 21% report never or rarely storing their firearms safely.

Political affiliation also influences safe storage behaviors. Democratic gun owners are more likely to report always storing guns safely (53% vs. 28% of Republicans) and less likely to report unsafe storage (22% vs. 29%). Interestingly, there were no significant differences in gun storage practices nationally based on whether the respondent lived in a state with a safe storage law.

Research on Safe Storage Campaigns

While safe storage education campaigns are often promoted, there is little evidence to suggest they lead to substantial changes in behavior. A large-scale campaign in 1997, including TV, radio ads, and billboards, aimed to increase safe storage through educational outreach and financial incentives for lock boxes. However, the results showed no significant improvement in safe storage practices among handgun-owning households with children (Sidman et al., 2005).

Evidence Supporting Clinical Counseling

Clinic- and community-based interventions have shown more promise. Research from 2000–2012 analyzed seven studies where clinicians provided counseling, with or without distributing safety devices. Studies that included safety devices (e.g., gun locks or safes) significantly improved storage practices, while those without such devices had little effect (Rowhani-Rahbar et al., 2016).

Child Access Prevention (CAP) Laws

CAP laws, which hold gun owners accountable if children access unsecured firearms, have shown mixed results:

- Ineffective: A study of gun owners found that living in a state with CAP laws did not lead to safer storage practices. Many respondents were unaware whether their state had CAP laws (Miller et al., 2022).
- Effective: Other research shows positive effects. A study found that CAP laws were associated with a 13% reduction in all-intent firearm fatalities and reductions in firearm homicides and suicides among children (Azad et al., 2020).



Impact on Children and Adolescents

- **Adolescent Suicide:** A 2021 study found that each 10% increase in firearm ownership was linked to a 39% rise in adolescent firearm suicides. CAP laws and safe storage mandates were associated with a 13% reduction in youth firearm suicides (Kivisto et al., 2021).
- **Pediatric Firearm Deaths:** A 20-year analysis showed that states with CAP laws had significantly lower pediatric firearm-related death rates than states without such laws. The 10 states with the highest firearm death rates consistently lacked CAP laws (Chammas et al., 2023).
- **Juvenile Homicides:** CAP laws were linked to a 17% reduction in firearm-related homicides committed by juveniles. The effect was stronger in states with strict safe storage laws (Anderson et al., 2018).

Recommendations

While Minnesotans are more likely to store their firearms safely compared to national averages, nearly one in five gun owners still report unsafe storage practices. Research indicates that providing clinicians with training to counsel patients on safe storage—along with distributing safety devices—could be an effective strategy to improve these rates.

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Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPO) in Minnesota



Research Project 3

Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPO) in Minnesota

On January 1, 2024, Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPO) became law in Minnesota. This law allows certain individuals, such as family members or law enforcement officers, to request a court order temporarily prohibiting someone from purchasing or possessing firearms during a crisis if they pose a risk of harming themselves or others.

Using publicly available case files, we examined how ERPOs were applied across the state during the first nine months of the law’s implementation.

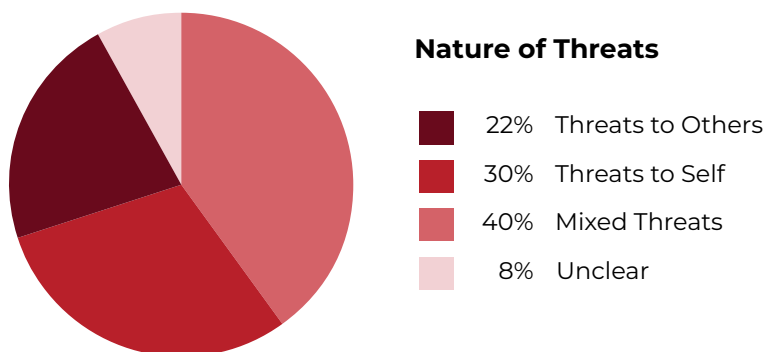
ERPO Cases: January – August 2024

In the first eight months of 2024, 77 ERPO cases were filed in Minnesota. Four subjects had two separate filings against them, so our analysis covers 73 unique individuals. The majority (90%) of ERPO cases were filed by law enforcement, while private individuals accounted for 10%. Mankato and Rochester Police Departments each filed the most cases (four), while no cases were filed in St. Paul or Minneapolis.

Out of all cases, three-quarters were approved, 16% were denied, and the remainder are still pending. Notably, of the 12 dismissed cases, four involved female subjects.

Subject Demographics

- **Gender:** Subjects were predominantly male (88%), with women making up 12%. Female subjects tended to be older, averaging 47 years compared to 40 years for men.
- **Households:** 51% of subjects lived with other people in their homes.
- **Race:** Most subjects were White (80%), followed by Black (8%), Asian (3%), and Native American (3%).
- **Mental Health:** Three-quarters of subjects had a history of mental health issues, while 15% had been previously arrested for a violent crime.
- **Firearms:** 41% of subjects had one gun in their home, 19% had two guns, and 40% had more than three firearms, with one respondent possessing up to 20 guns.



Compared to other states, Minnesota’s ERPO cases more frequently involved threats to others (72%), whereas in Connecticut, where ERPOs have been studied, most cases (68%) involved self-harm (Kapoor et al., 2024). Minnesota’s data more closely resembles patterns seen in Oregon (75% interpersonal threats (Zeoli et al., 2021)) and Washington (72% (Rowhani-Rahbar et al., 2020)).



Domestic Violence and Mental Health

- **Domestic Violence:** Half of all ERPO cases involved a risk of domestic violence, with 81% of those threats coming from a boyfriend, husband, or ex-partner.
- **Mental Health:** 26% of subjects were experiencing psychosis at the time of the filing.
- **Threats to Law Enforcement:** 19% of cases included threats directed toward law enforcement, often involving “suicide by cop.”
- **Murder-Suicide Threats:** 35% of cases involved threats of murder-suicide.

Case Examples

Threats to Self:

- In one case, a man shot himself three times but survived. He admitted to the deputies that he was attempting suicide and stated, “I couldn’t even get this right.” His family revealed that he had been struggling with depression due to health issues and had access to about 20 firearms.
- A gun range removed another respondent because staff believed he was at risk of killing himself. He had a history of suicidal ideation and multiple prior calls to law enforcement.
- A woman’s boyfriend returned home after an argument with self-inflicted injuries. He struck himself with a rock, and his girlfriend explained that he suffered from severe depression but was not formally diagnosed or receiving treatment.

Threats to Others:

- A petitioner reported long-term domestic and financial abuse from the respondent, culminating in a recent domestic assault that required medical attention and led to her being placed in a shelter.
- Law enforcement responded to a call where the respondent claimed he needed a Glock for protection and believed his neighbors were sending “electric worms” through the ceiling to shock him. He was found pointing a firearm at the ceiling and making threats.
- A neighbor reported that the respondent could no longer handle caring for his wife, who had dementia, and had stated he would “do it in the garage” to avoid making a mess, implying an intent to kill her.

Threats to Both Self and Others:

- A respondent’s father contacted the sheriff’s office, stating that his son planned to kill a tenant and carry out a murder-suicide with a woman he referred to as his wife, though no such person existed.
- Another respondent threatened to die by “suicide by cop” and was found with a loaded rifle aimed at the door, waiting for officers. He had previously been placed on a transport hold for mental health treatment.
- One individual disclosed to his therapist that he planned to drive to kill his aunt, then his brother, and finally himself. Deputies seized a rifle and ammunition from him.



ERPO Effectiveness and Recommendations

The initial data suggest that ERPOs are being used as intended in Minnesota, with firearms being removed from individuals who present a serious risk of self-harm or violence toward others. However, there are clear gaps in the training and awareness of the law, particularly in the Twin Cities where no cases have been filed.

We recommend expanding training on ERPOs across the state to ensure law enforcement officers and judges understand when and how to use the law. Future research should include interviews with officers and judges to identify any challenges in ERPO implementation.

Federal Funding for ERPO Programs

Minnesota will receive \$3.7 million in federal funding through the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of 2022. This funding, part of the Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program (Byrne SCIP), will become available in fall 2024. The funds are designated for the creation and support of ERPO programs, as well as other gun violence reduction initiatives.

The crisis intervention advisory board, which includes Executive Director Jillian Peterson, has identified two priority areas for this funding:

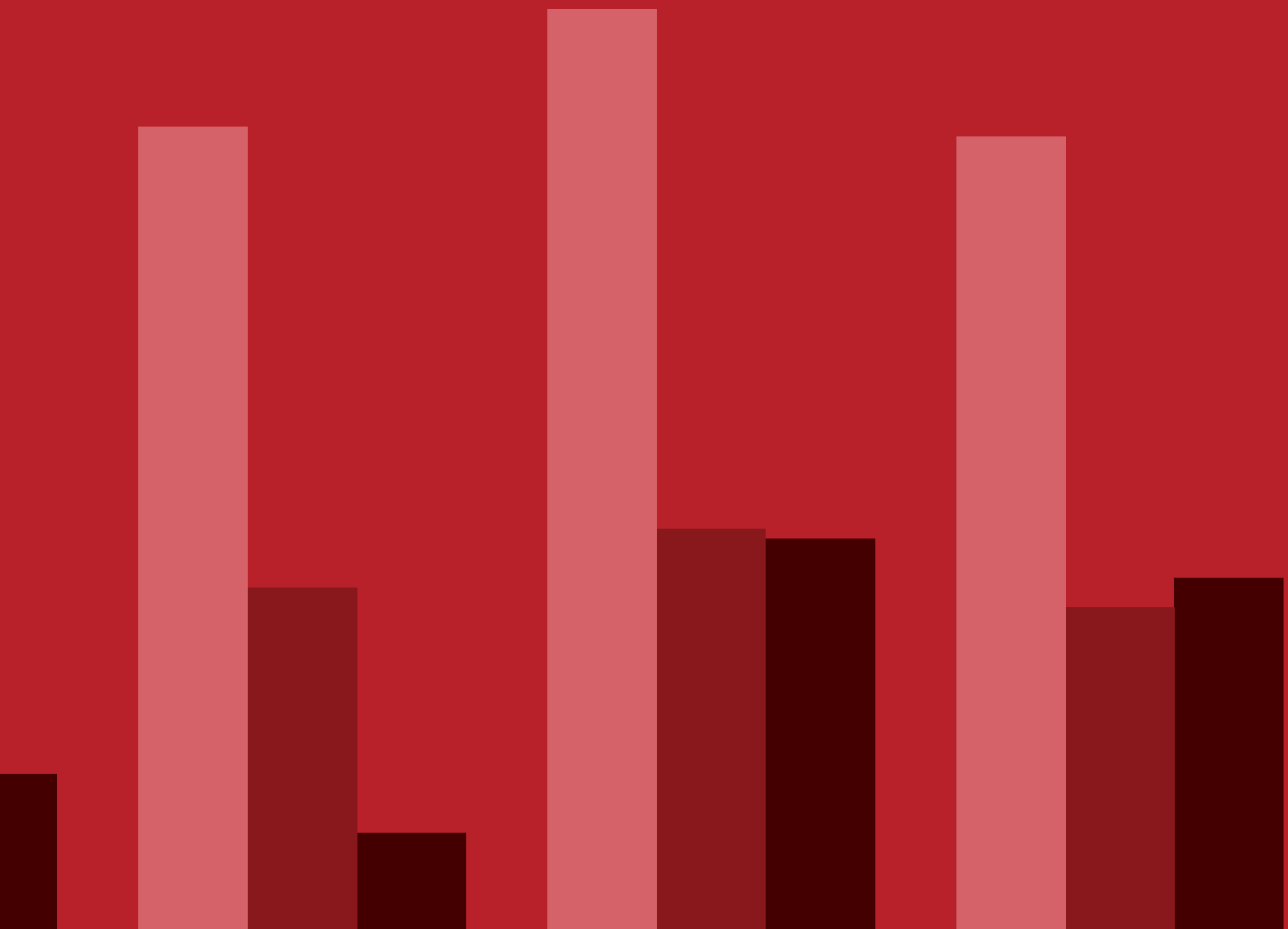
1. **Statewide ERPO Coordination and Support:** This includes data collection, analysis, establishing best practices, and providing education and training for all involved parties.
2. **Crisis Intervention Services:** This includes funding for crisis intervention research, evaluation, and grants to organizations providing crisis support services.

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The Changing Nature of Homicide in the Twin Cities





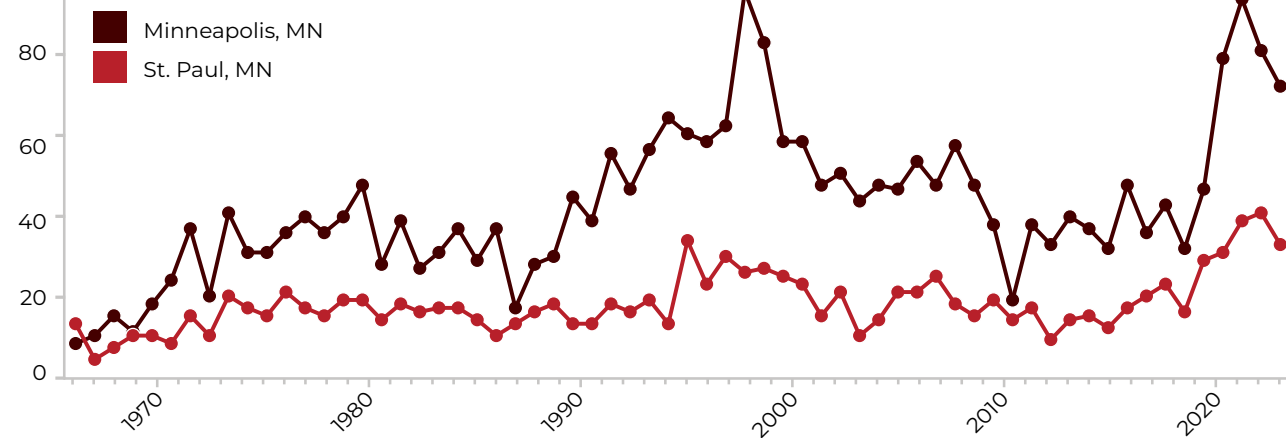
Research Project 4

The Changing Nature of Homicide in the Twin Cities

The year 2020 witnessed an unprecedented surge in homicides across the United States, with a 30% increase from the previous year, which is the largest annual rise in over a century. This sharp increase, which saw firearms involved in 77% of murders has sparked extensive debate and research into its underlying causes.

Data from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety show that in 2018, the state recorded 104 murders, a figure that increased by more than 12% in 2019, when the state recorded 117 murders. Murders in the state in 2020, when violent crimes spiked nationwide, skyrocketed to 185. In 2021, the state recorded 201 murders, 182 in 2022, and 172 in 2023. Despite modest decreases since peaking in 2021, homicide remains elevated above pre-2020 levels. The 172 murders tallied in the state last year translate to a rate of about 3 deaths per 100,000 people, which is double the rate of the record lows set in the 2010s. Minnesota’s murders are also highly concentrated in the Twin Cities. Hennepin and Ramsey Counties account for 32% of the state population but over 70% of all cases.

Minnesota Twin City Murders, 1960-2023



Several explanations have been proposed for the sudden murder spike in 2020 and 2021:

- The COVID-19 pandemic brought about massive disruptions to daily life, leading to economic hardship, social isolation, and widespread uncertainty. These factors potentially increased the likelihood of violence as individuals struggled with heightened stress and fewer social support systems.
- The murder of George Floyd and the subsequent nationwide protests against police brutality marked a significant shift in police-community relations. Some have argued that a reduction in proactive policing and an erosion of trust in law enforcement may have contributed to the rise in violent crime.
- A record number of gun purchases in 2020 and the rising belief that the government is illegitimate or unable to provide for its citizens are also believed to have played a role. For example, the pandemic shut down schools and forced nonprofits, including community violence intervention programs, to limit their services or repurpose themselves entirely to meet new needs.



George Floyd's murder and its aftermath of course was not uniformly experienced. In Minnesota specifically, it sparked widespread public outrage, leading to significant civil unrest in Minneapolis, Saint Paul, and surrounding areas from May 26 to 30, 2020. During these five days, the Twin Cities experienced severe rioting and looting, resulting in extensive property damage, including the destruction of the Minneapolis 3rd police precinct, which was set ablaze by demonstrators. The unrest prompted Minnesota Governor Tim Walz to deploy the National Guard, marking the largest state activation since World War II. By the time the National Guard and other responding forces were demobilized in June 2020, the civil disturbances had led to hundreds of arrests and over \$500 million in damages to about 1,500 properties, making it the second most destructive period of unrest in U.S. history after the 1992 Los Angeles riots.

We examined homicides that occurred in the Twin Cities from 2018-2023. This study involved two components – a statistical analysis of the homicide trends over this period in partnership with the BCA, and qualitative interviews with 18 perpetrators of those homicides.

Quantitative Analysis

Using incident and perpetrator data provided by the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA), we analyzed 643 homicides occurring in Hennepin and Ramsey Counties between 2018 and 2022. Most of these homicides (54%) took place in Minneapolis, while 26% occurred in Saint Paul, and 20% in surrounding suburbs.

Victims

- Gender: 80% of homicide victims were male.
- Race/Ethnicity: The majority of victims were Black (68%), followed by White (26%), Hispanic (6%), Asian (3%), and Native American (3%).
- Age: Victims ranged from newborns to 94 years old.¹

The most common relationships between victims and offenders were:

- Stranger (23%)
- Group/gang affiliation (23%)
- Friend or acquaintance (20%)
- Romantic partner (16%)
- Other family member (11%)

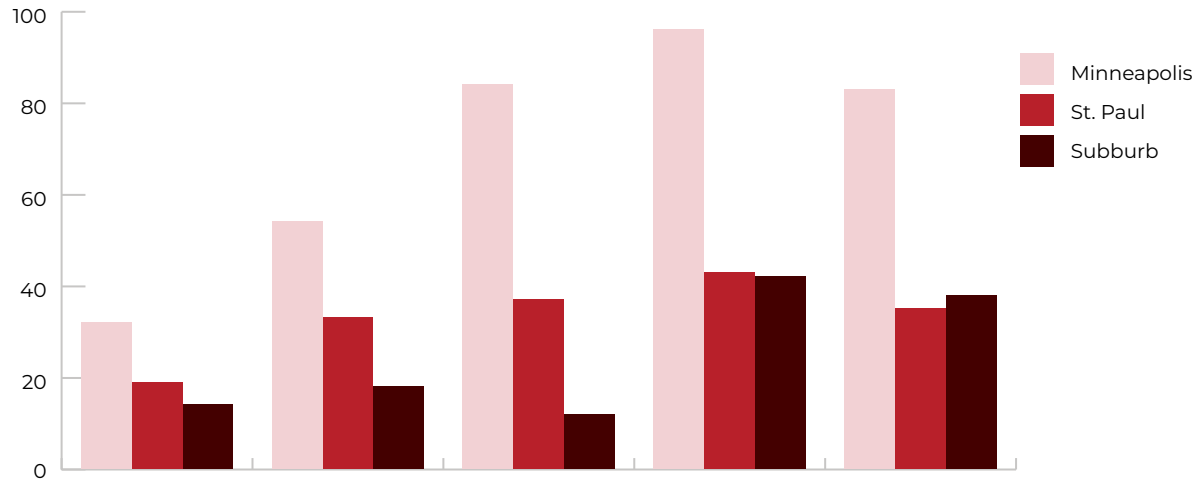
Perpetrators

- Gender: 87% of homicide perpetrators were male.
- Race/Ethnicity: Perpetrators were predominantly Black (72%), followed by White (22%), Asian (4%), Hispanic (3%), and Native American (2%).
- Age: Perpetrators ranged from 9 to 95 years old.

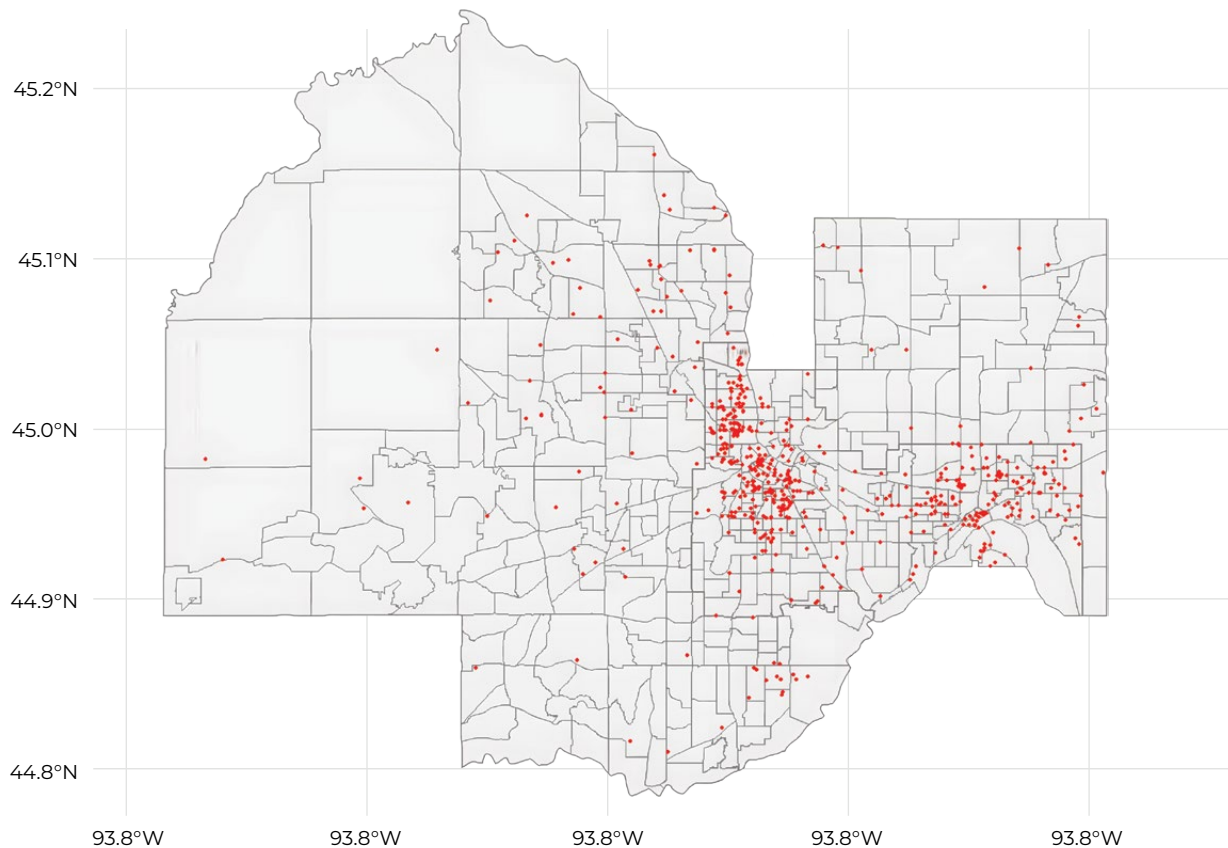


Geographic Distribution

The data revealed a significant increase in homicides during 2020 and 2021, with the rise most pronounced in Minneapolis and its surrounding suburbs.



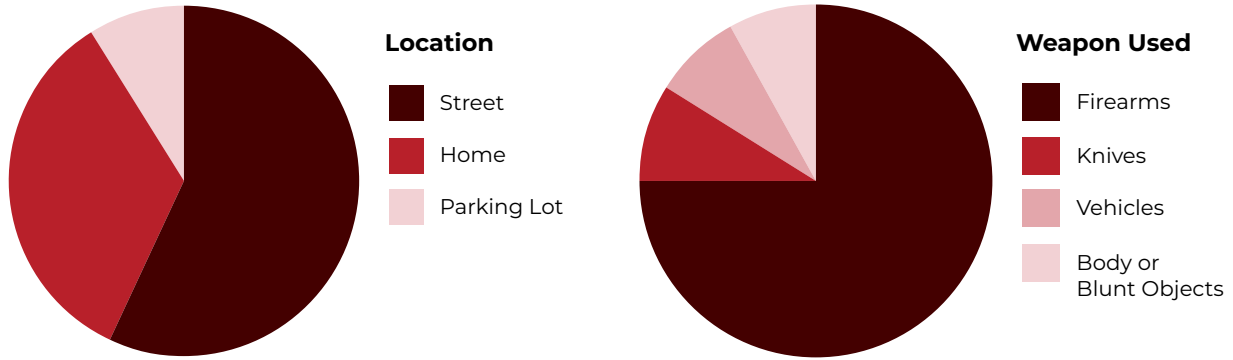
Map of Twin Cities Homicides 2018 – 2022





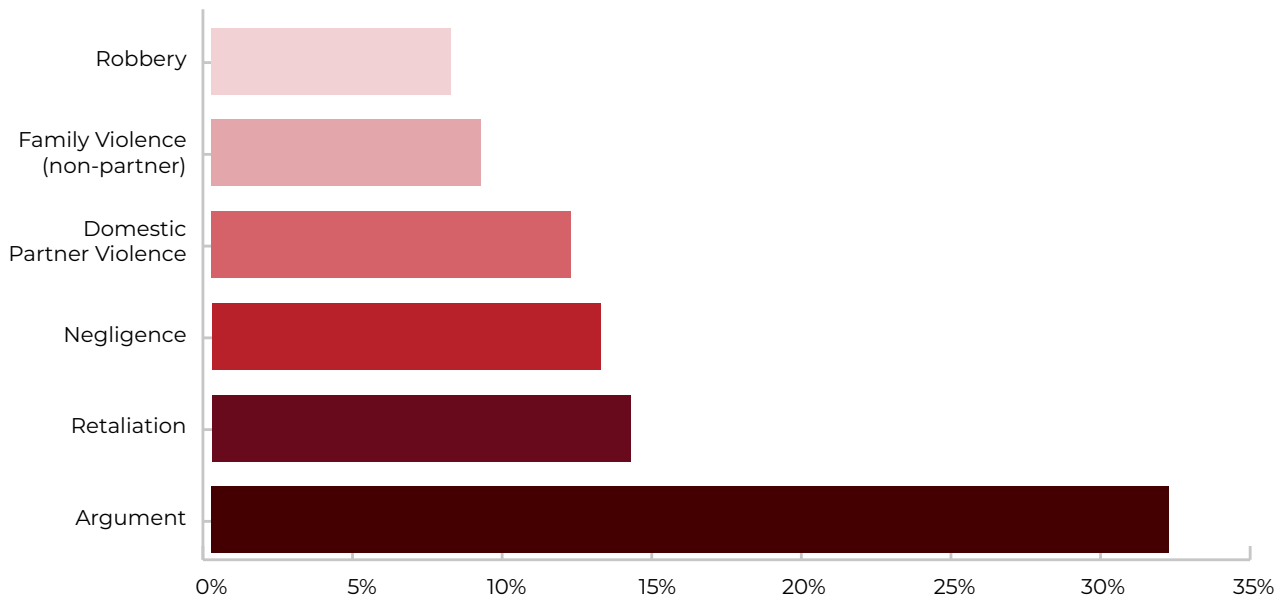
Homicide Circumstances

Knives and blunt objects were most commonly used in domestic violence-related homicides, while vehicles were involved in negligent homicide cases.



Most Common Homicide Circumstances

Suburban homicides were more likely to involve negligence or domestic violence.

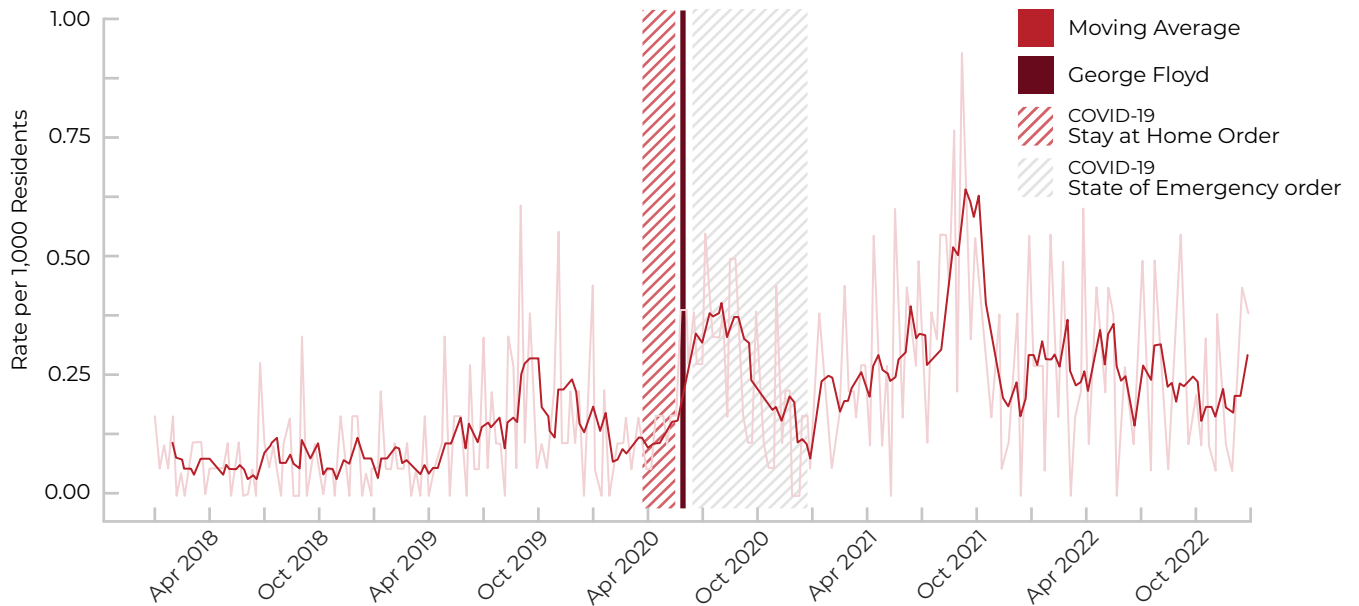




Impact of George Floyd’s Murder

The most dramatic rise in homicides occurred following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, which coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Weekly Homicides in Hennepin & Ramsey Counties
2018-2022



Next Steps

We have partnered with Dr. Ryan Larson, Prof. Chris Uggen, and colleagues at the University of Minnesota to conduct a more detailed examination of the increase in homicides following George Floyd’s murder and during the pandemic. This study will use geocoding to explore how homicides relate to factors such as reductions in policing and school closures.

Data analysis is ongoing.

Qualitative Analysis

In collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Justice, 18 men who committed homicide in the Twin Cities between 2018 and 2023 were interviewed at Lino Lakes and Rush City Correctional Facilities. Fourteen self-identified as Black and four were White. Their ages ranged from 18 to 62 years at the time of the interview, with a mean age of 27.3 years at the time of their offenses. Geographically, the participants were primarily from urban areas in the Twin Cities: 10 were from Minneapolis, five from St. Paul, and three from suburban areas. The victims in these cases ranged in age from 4 weeks to 75 years, with a mean age of 32.9 years. There were 14 male victims and four female victims. Nine victims were Black, six were White, one was American Indian, one was Asian, and one was Latinx. The perpetrators were convicted of various types of homicides including escalating fights, retaliatory gang violence, robberies, domestic homicide, negligent homicide, killing a child, and homicide related to drug dealing.



Existing Vulnerabilities

The 18 interviewees in this study were already entrenched in chaotic and crime-filled lives long before the events of 2020. Many reported growing up in environments marked by parental substance abuse and incarceration, which often led to unstable and tumultuous childhoods. For instance, several had mothers who struggled with drug addiction and fathers who were frequently in and out of prison.

Trouble began as early as elementary school for most participants, with many interviewees describing behavioral issues, mental health diagnoses, and early onset delinquency. Things escalated during adolescence, with interviewees recounting experiences of frequent fights, involvement in gangs, and associations with peers who were similarly entrenched in the criminal justice system.

High school years were marked by a progression into more serious criminal activities and substance abuse. Many interviewees reported bouncing between different schools or dropping out altogether, with their lives dominated by crime and drugs. For example, Interviewee 7 was expelled from school after posing with a gun in the bathroom and sharing the photo on social media. Most reported easy access to illegal firearms.

Significant turning points in their lives, such as the death of a parent or guardian, frequently compounded interviewee's struggles. Interviewee 15 recalled coming home one night as a teenager to find his stepfather dead. *"I've never seen so much blood. It was everywhere, like a horror movie. His guts were out,"* he explained. These losses often left our participants with an acute sense of abandonment and grief.

Life in 2020: Murder in a Time of Crisis

- Interviewee 1's, a Black male, mother died from an overdose when he was 14, followed by his grandmother's death from cancer a year later. He was left homeless. The pandemic led to the closure of shelters, leaving him with no where to stay. He described a profound sense of despair, compounded by the unrest following George Floyd's murder, which brought increased violence to the streets. One night, a confrontation escalated when a group attacked his friend. In the charged atmosphere where he believed others were armed, he preemptively shot to defend himself and his friend, resulting in homicide
- Interviewee 18, an African immigrant, had long struggled with schizophrenia and drug addiction during his early adulthood. However, in the period leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, he was sober, managing his mental health, and was working at a local bakery. The pandemic closed the bakery where he worked, and the lack of employment and the stress of the pandemic contributed to him stopping his prescription medication renewals. As a result, his untreated schizophrenia spiraled out of control, leading to severe paranoia, hallucinations, and delusions. He described this period as a time when "everything collapsed." In a psychotic episode, he committed a tragic and incomprehensible act—murdering his newborn baby, responding to voices.



- Interviewee 6, another Black male, legally obtained a permit to carry a handgun in public under Minnesota law, a decision spurred by the increasingly volatile social climate following the election of Donald Trump in 2016. His decision to start carrying a gun in public around the time of the COVID-19 pandemic was driven by fears of “*martial law*” and a need “*to protect my family*.” His frequent monitoring of a local crime-monitoring app left him convinced that his neighborhood was increasingly unsafe. One morning, an fight erupted between him and the father of his girlfriend’s children and, feeling threatened, Interviewee 6 shot and killed him, believing that his own life was in imminent danger. It was the first time he had ever pointed his gun at someone or discharged it.
- Interviewee 12, a middle-aged White male, had been using drugs heavily. The pandemic’s disruptions had intensified his substance use, he told us, and he found himself increasingly unable to control his addiction. So high on a mixture of stimulants and alcohol that he was hallucinating, he unintentionally drove to a group of people, in a state of confusion. He lost control of his vehicle and “smashed into” someone.
- Interviewee 8, a young Black male, found himself entangled in a life of escalating crime and chaos after he dropped out of his COVID-enforced virtual school: “*I wasn’t doing that*.” He was then thrust into a changed world marked by the “*George Floyd stuff*” and a breakdown in social order. He described a period where “*there were no rules*”. Interviewee 8 felt a sense of emptiness and despair, driven largely by a perennial threat of violence. He described his existence as “*life was nothing*” and “*life was empty*,” underlining his feelings of being “*lost*.” These feelings ultimately led to murder during the robbery of a drug dealer.
- Interviewee 15, an older career drug dealer, explained to us how pandemic lockdowns disrupted local drug supply chains, making drugs more expensive and difficult to obtain. The social unrest combined with the federal program that added \$600 per week to state unemployment benefits, resulted in drug users having more money, creating an even more volatile and violent drug market. The combination of increased money circulation and a disrupted supply chain led to heightened tensions and conflicts in the drug trade, some of which turned deadly.
- Several interviewees argued the chaotic period marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and the civil unrest following George Floyd’s murder created a self-reinforcing cycle of violence that was difficult to break. Interviewee 10 said four of his closest friends were shot that summer, while a fifth was out there “*doing the shooting*.” Interviewee 3, a young Black male, observed, “*All around, there was a lot of shit going on. Nobody give a fuck about no police*.” Interviewee 4 said the pandemic at first was “*fun*” and “*one big summer break*” because school was online. But he was shot at five times in 18 months.



Mental Health and Suicidality

- Out of the 18 participants, 16 discussed prior mental health diagnoses including a combination of depression, anxiety, ADHD, and PTSD. Participant 12, diagnosed with schizophrenia, had multiple hospitalizations in psychiatric facilities. Participant 18 was also diagnosed with schizophrenia during a required mental health assessment on probation as a teenager, which led to self-harm.
- Seven participants described previous suicide attempts prior to committing homicide. Participant 13 attempted suicide two years before his homicide. He realized he couldn't afford Christmas presents for his kids. He took a gun that he had stolen from his ex-girlfriend, went to the garage, cocked the gun in his mouth and his mom walked in. Participant 14 slit his wrists after his grandma died when he was 16 years old. His mom found him and took him to the hospital. Participant 15 was hospitalized for attempting suicide by drinking Visine. He said he was *"feeling dark"* and *"my stomach was pumped for three days."*
- In addition to the seven participants with previous suicide attempts, an additional four participants anticipated dying early when asked about how they imagined their future before their crime. Participant 1 reported, *"I didn't think I'd survive for the future."* Participant 3 said *"Did I have plans for the future at any point? Hell no. I would die or go to jail."* Participant 7, when asked if ever thought about where he would be at 25, said, *"Either dead or in prison. You can't leave that life. All of our lifespans were real short."* Participant 14 said he *"knew his life would end with death or being locked up and he was prepared for that."*
- Another four participants described feeling hopeless and like nothing mattered anymore, though not explicitly suicidal. Participant 4 said he felt that way after his best friend was killed at the age of 15, having grown up together, he felt angry at the world. Participant 5 described the hopelessness and chaos of his life when he was fifteen, *"I would crash at people's houses and dig through cars all night. I never went to school. I started heavy drug use and everything became a blur."*



Recommendations

- This study highlights the necessity of providing robust social and mental health support during periods of societal upheaval, especially for marginalized people who may not trust of formal institutions. The closure of support systems such as schools and homeless shelters, the breakdown of routine mental health care, and the lack of community-based interventions contributed significantly to the participants' descent into criminal behavior.
- Law enforcement and social services should consider adopting more community-centered approaches that prioritize the well-being and stability of individuals in at-risk populations. Interventions that address the root causes of instability, such as housing insecurity, unemployment, and mental health issues. This could be tied to Group Violence Intervention (GVI) and the deployment of violence interrupters to address rising tensions and prevent the escalation of violence as detailed in the interviewee narratives.
- This study highlighted the overlap between despair, suicidality, hopelessness, and violence. Suicide prevention strategies and programs that focus on future planning (such as mentorship programs), may serve as a mitigation strategy for serious violence.
- School bonding is an evidence-based protective factor that can lead to nonviolent development. A meta-analysis examining school bonding and social connectedness among 16 studies found that it's also associated with reduced reports of suicidal thoughts and behaviors, even among high-risk youth (Marraccini & Brier, 2017). Providing resources and programming for strong bonds between youth, their families, and their school environment is an important area of investment for stabilizing post-Covid.

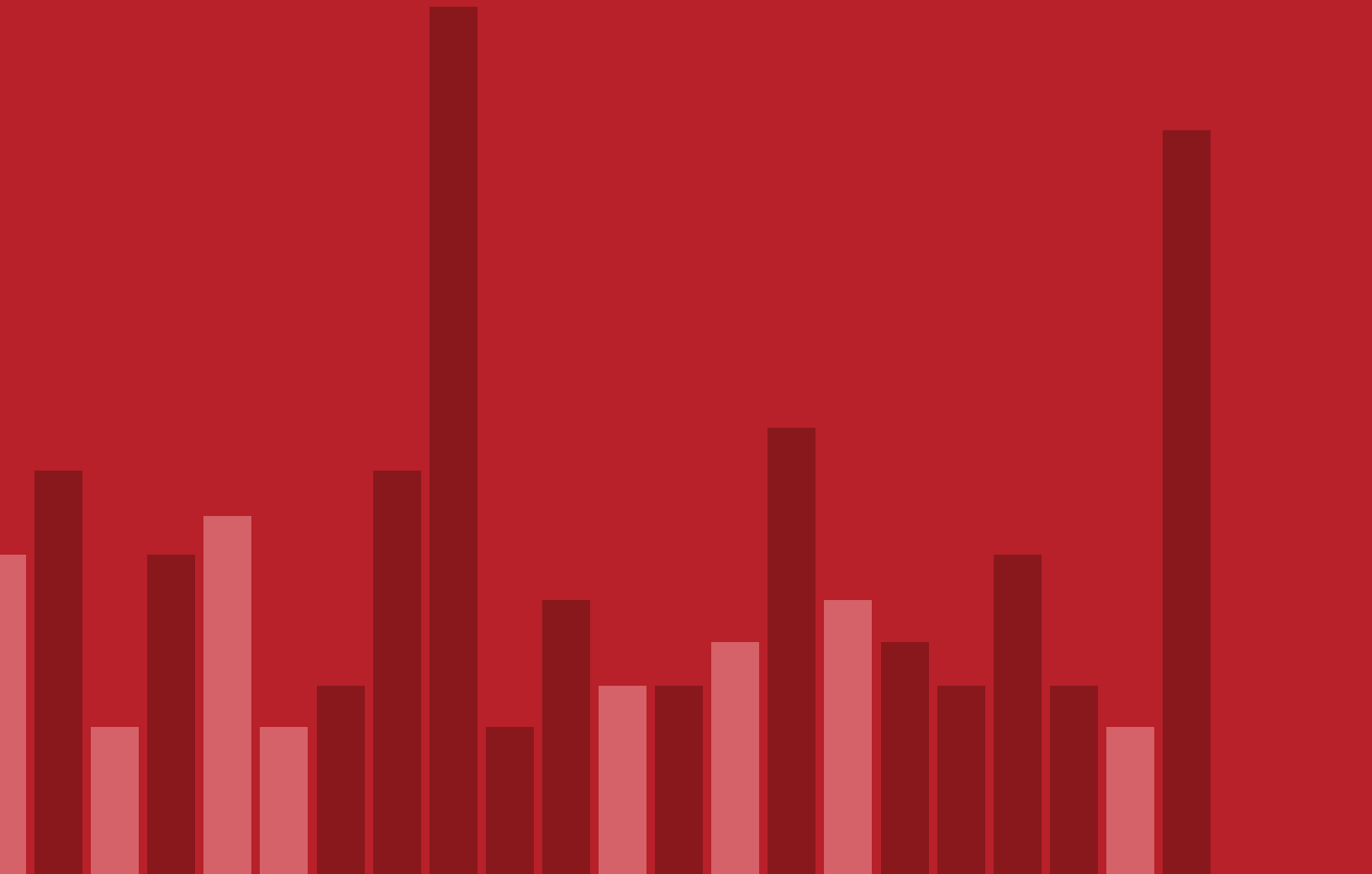


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Research Project

5

Updated Mass Shooter Database





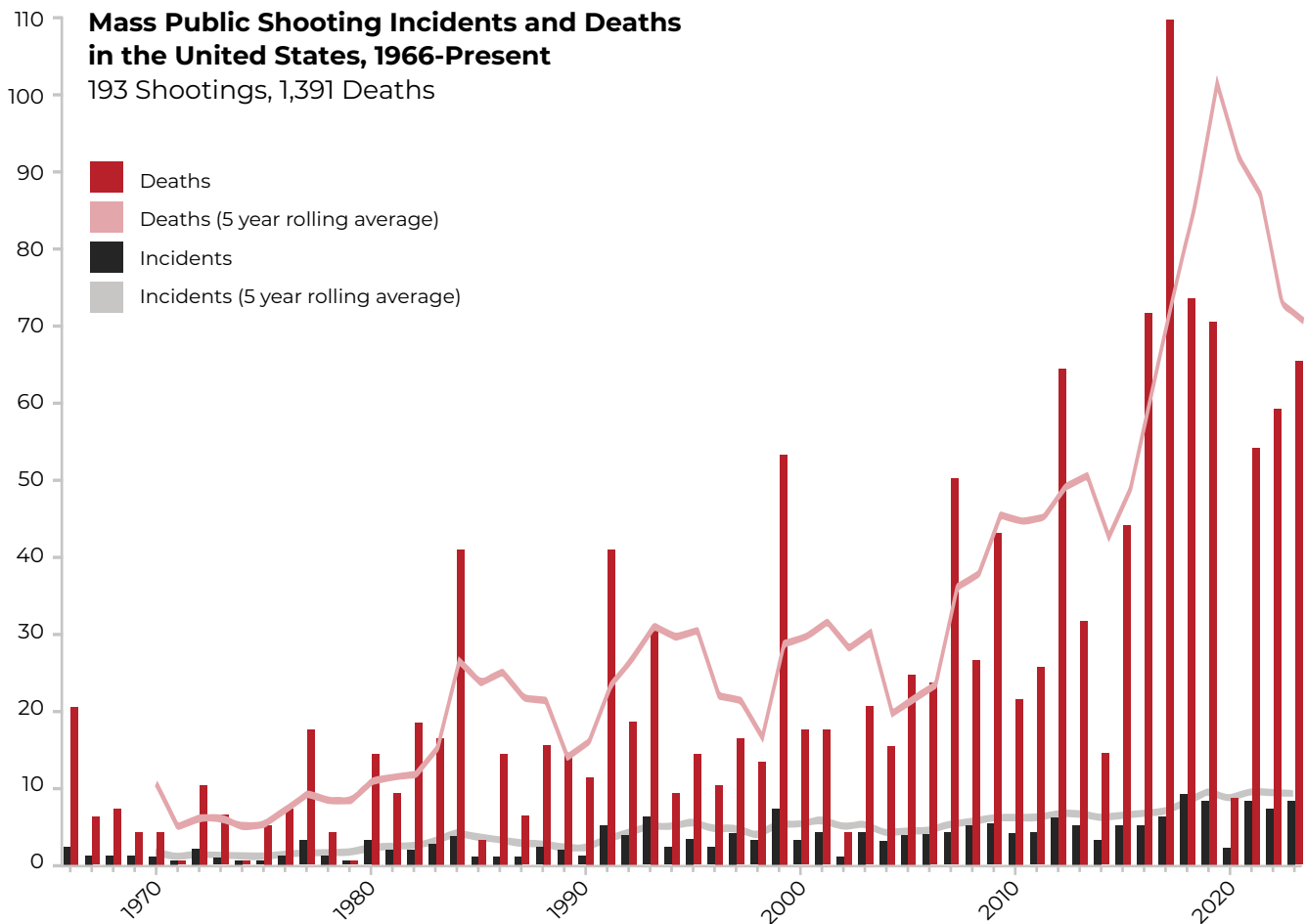
Research Project 5

Updated Mass Shooter Database

The Violence Prevention Project’s Mass Shooter Database includes any perpetrator who killed four or more people in a public location since 1966. To understand the lives and motivations of people who shoot indiscriminately in public, this database excludes cases related to domestic violence and cases related to other criminal activity or commonplace circumstance (i.e. robbery or argument).

The database, currently in its 9th version, includes 198 mass shooting perpetrators each coded on over 150 variables. There is also a firearms database that provides information on over 400 firearms used in mass shootings, and information on the nearly 1400 victims killed in mass shootings in the United States since 1966.

The database shows that mass shootings have been increasing over time, both in terms of the number of mass shootings per year and the number of people killed in each mass shooting.





Our data shows a common pathway to violence for mass shootings:



Current intervention strategies tend to focus on opportunity – limiting access to firearms, training people to respond to shootings to minimize casualties, and hardening potential targets. However, our research has found that effective prevention should also include trauma screening and intervention, crisis intervention and suicide prevention training, crisis response teams, and social media awareness training.

Our research shows that mass shootings, especially those occurring in K-12 schools, don't just happen out of nowhere – there are typically warning signs.

For example, a year before a 14-year-old boy was arrested for allegedly opening fire in his high school math class in Winder, Georgia, on Sept. 4, 2024 – killing two teachers and two students – authorities visited his home to investigate several anonymous tips about online threats to commit a school shooting.

When they interviewed the boy, who was 13 at the time, he denied making the threats. The father told police there were hunting guns in the house but that the boy didn't have “unsupervised access” to the weapons.

The FBI said in a statement on the day of the shooting that there was “no probable cause for an arrest” and that local law enforcement “alerted local schools for continued monitoring of the subject.”

Teachers at the school had been supplied with special identification cards with panic buttons a week prior to the shooting. While authorities credit the ID cards with preventing the shooting from being worse than it was, the action still came too late to stop the killings.

In many ways, the story mirrors dozens of similar stories that we have collected in recent years in our effort to study the lives of mass shooters. It typifies what we believe is one of the biggest challenges that schools face when it comes to averting school shootings: recognizing and acting upon warning signs that school shooters almost always give well before they open fire.



In our database of U.S. mass shootings, there have now been 15 shootings at K-12 schools. The first took place in Stockton, California, in 1989.

Seven of those school shootings occurred in the past decade, including the second and third deadliest on record: Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, in 2022 (21 dead) and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, in 2018 (17 dead). The deadliest in history occurred in December 2012, when 20 children and six adult staff members were murdered at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut.

In all, 138 people were killed in the attacks and at least 177 people were injured.

Most mass school shootings were carried out by a lone gunman, with just two – Columbine and the 1998 shooting at Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas – carried out by two gunmen.

The choice of “gunmen” to describe the perpetrators is accurate – all but one of the mass school shootings in our database were carried out by men or boys. The average age of those involved in carrying out the attacks was 18 — the youngest was 11 and the oldest was 32. As juveniles, most school shooters used guns borrowed or stolen from parents, caregivers and other significant adults in their lives.

After every school shooting, people say “we never thought something like this could happen in our community.” However, mass school shootings happen most frequently in small suburban or rural communities like Winder, Georgia. There, the suspect is a 14-year-old student at the school. This is unsurprising. Most school shooters have a connection to the school they target. In our database, we found that 15 of the 17 school shooters were either current or former students.

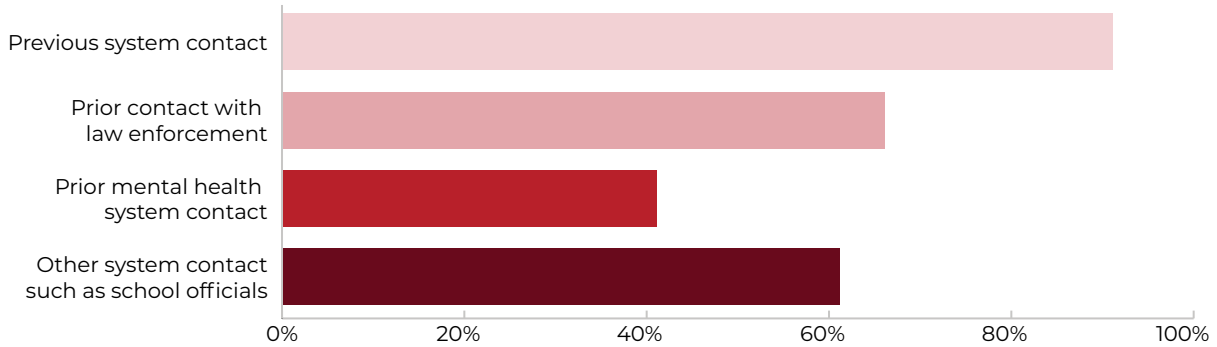
For most perpetrators, the mass shooting event is intended to be a final act. The majority of school mass shooters die in the attack. Of the 17 mass school shooters in our database, eight were apprehended. The rest died on the scene, nearly all by suicide – the lone exception being the Robb Elementary shooter in Uvalde, who was shot dead by police.

Inspired by past school shooters, some perpetrators are seeking fame and notoriety. However, most school mass shooters are driven by despair and generalized anger; over 80% of school mass shooters showed signs of a crisis before the shooting, including depression, mood swings, agitation, isolation, trouble with daily tasks and other noticeable behavior changes.

Most importantly, over 90% leaked their plans ahead of time to others, preempting their attacks by leaving posts, messages or videos warning of their intent. School shooters communicate their intent to do harm in advance as a final, desperate cry for help.

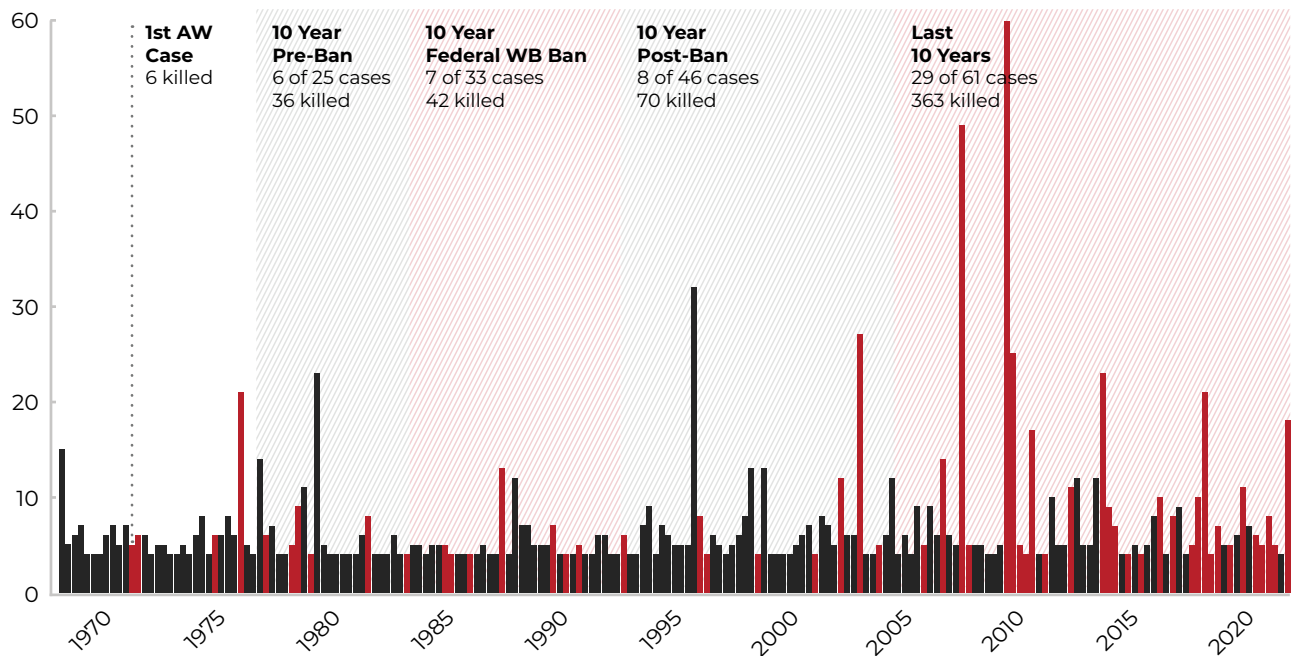


The key to stopping these tragedies is being alert to these warning signs and acting on them immediately. We recently added new variables to Version 9 of the database examining previous system contact:



At the same time, parents can be reminded to keep guns secure. Almost all shootings by children and teens can be prevented by safe storage of firearms and accountability for adult gun owners. When a weapon is stored separately from its ammunition, locked and unloaded, it is much more difficult for someone to quickly use it in a violent attack.

The data also shows a rise in the number of perpetrators using assault-style weapons in mass shootings over time. This is likely due both the weapon's capability for a large-number of casualties (and therefore more media coverage) as well as a social-contagion or copy-cat effect.





Recommendations

- School mass shooters are insiders, meaning they know the building security and have been through active shooter drills. Physical security alone is insufficient to prevent mass shootings.
- Mass shooters have significant trauma histories. Universal trauma screening and intervention in elementary school may prevent the pathway to violence.
- Mass shooters are in a noticeable crisis, meaning students, staff, and parents should be trained to recognize the signs of a crisis and know where to report it.
- Mass shootings are designed to be final act, meaning suicide prevention may prevent a shooting more effectively than punishment or exclusion. Everyone should be trained in suicide prevention and crisis intervention.
- Mass shooters tell other students about their plans, meaning schools and workplaces need anonymous reporting systems and strong relationships between students and staff to encourage reporting.



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Research Project

6

New National Homicide Databases



Research Project 6

New National Homicide Databases

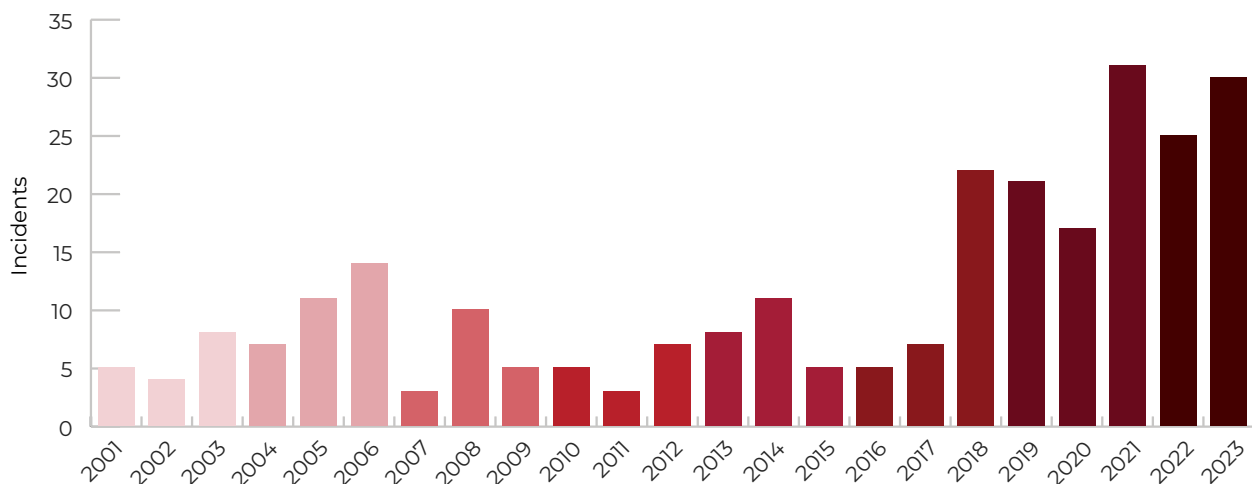
This year, the VPPRC built and released three new homicide databases. The goal of this project is to provide data to reporters, researchers, and policymakers to understand the nature of homicides in the United States to develop data-driven prevention strategies. Each database was built in collaboration with advanced undergraduate students at Hamline University. These research assistants underwent a rigorous training process, which included coding ten cases to establish reliability before proceeding with the actual dataset. Each homicide case within the dataset was independently coded by two separate coders to minimize bias and error. Discrepancies between the two sets of codes were thoroughly reviewed and resolved through discussions involving Dr. Jillian Peterson and Dr. James Densley. A final review of each case was conducted by a fourth coder, acting as an additional layer of quality control. The research team convened weekly to deliberate on any cases that presented coding challenges, ensuring a comprehensive and unified approach to data classification. This meticulous coding process mirrors the methodology previously utilized in the creation of The Violence Project Database of Mass Shooters (Peterson & Densley, 2024), highlighting its robustness and effectiveness in handling sensitive and complex data.

Gun Homicides at U.S. K-12 Schools

Incidents

Our new K-12 school database is comprehensive database that includes every gun homicide that occurred on a K-12 school campus from 2000 – 2023 (274 homicides, which killed 395 victims). VPPRC collaborated with the K-12 School Shooting Database to collect and code cases.

Homicide Incidents at K-12 Schools



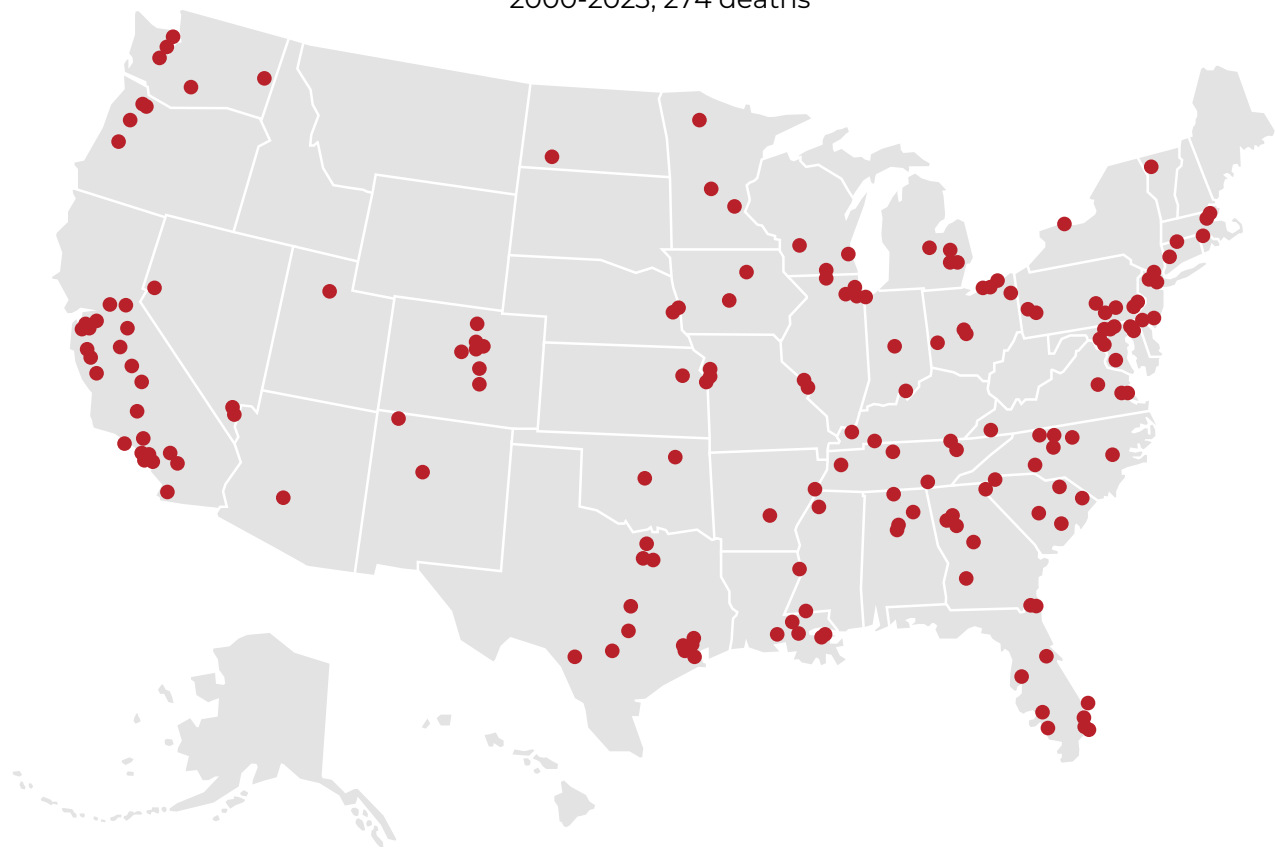


The number of homicides at K-12 schools has been increasing over time, particularly in the past five years.

- The most common states for a homicide to occur at a K-12 school are California (33), Texas (23), Pennsylvania (19), and Florida (16).
- The most common month for a school homicide is October, and the least common months are June and July.
- High schools are the most common location (59.5%), followed by elementary schools (25.5%) and middle schools (10.6%).

Map of K-12 School Homicides

2000-2023, 274 deaths



Minnesota Cases

Four gun homicides in the database occurred at K-12 schools in Minnesota:

- Rocori High School in Cold Springs MN in 2003 when two students were killed in the gym by another student in a mental health crisis who had been bullied.
- Red Lake High School in 2005 when a current student killed nine students in a classroom in one of the worst school mass shootings in history.
- Rosevelt High School in Minneapolis in 2021 when two adults were found shot and killed in car parked in front of the school.
- South Education Center in Richfield in 2022 when a fight broke out between five students in front the school. Two students were shot and one was killed.



Victims

- Most homicides at K-12 schools resulted in one victim (87.6%). Two victims were killed in 8.0% of cases and there were three or more victims in 4.4% of cases.
- The deadliest homicides in the database occurred at Red Lake High School in 2005 (9 victims), Santa Fe High School in 2018 (10 victims), Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018 (17 victims), Robb Elementary in 2022 (21 victims), and Sandy Hook Elementary in 2012 (27 victims).
- The majority of victims were male (70.6%).
- 35.4% of victims were Black, 29.4% were White, 16.2% were Latino, 2.5% were Native American, and 2.3% were Asian.
- Many of the victims were students of the school (42.0%).
- An additional 8.6% of victims were staff of the school and 7.3% were family members of students or staff. There was no relationship between the victim and the school in 32.4% of cases.

Perpetrators

- Of cases where the perpetrator is known, 97.3% were male.
- 75.0% of perpetrators were Black, 20.3% were white, and 17.4% were Latino.
- Students were the perpetrator in 23.6% of cases, staff in 3.0% of cases, family in 6.4%, former students in 6.4%, and no known relationship in 55.2% of cases.
- 21.2% of perpetrators were previously known to the police.
- Most perpetrators were between the ages of 15 and 19 years old.
- In most cases the perpetrator fled and then was caught (54.0%).
- The perpetrator escaped and was not arrested in 20.4% of cases and died by suicide in 9.5% of cases.

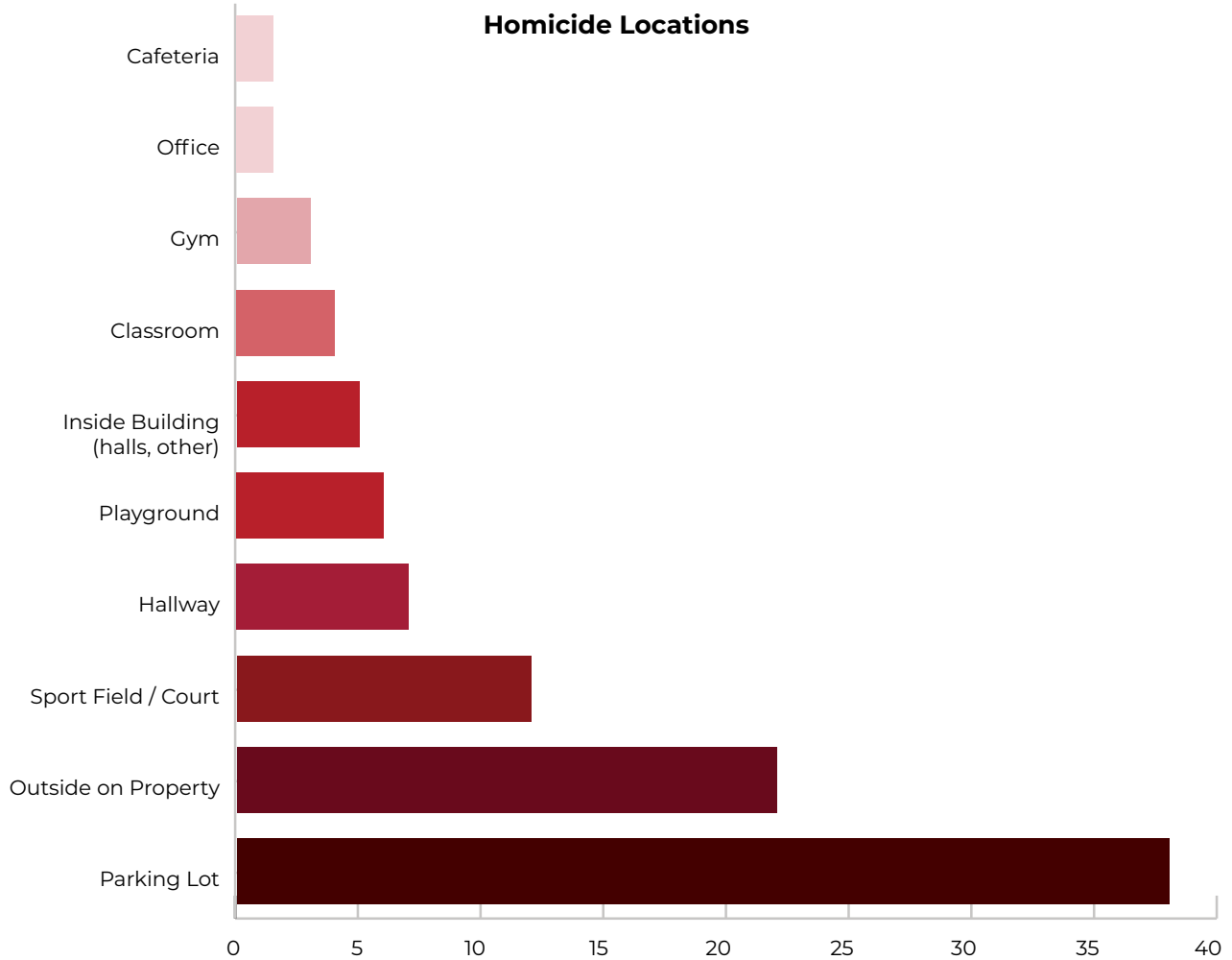
Students and Former Student Perpetrators

- Current and former students were more likely to commit homicide at large schools that were more likely to be suburban or rural.
- These homicides were more likely to occur inside the building and during class and involved more victims killed and wounded.
- Most of the active shooters in the database were current students of the school (81.5%). Student perpetrators were more likely to be White, to use an assault weapon, to have a history of mental health issues, to show warning signs, and to commit suicide on scene.



Location

- More homicides took place outside on school property (79.9%) rather than inside the school (20.1%)



About a quarter of homicides took place during class.

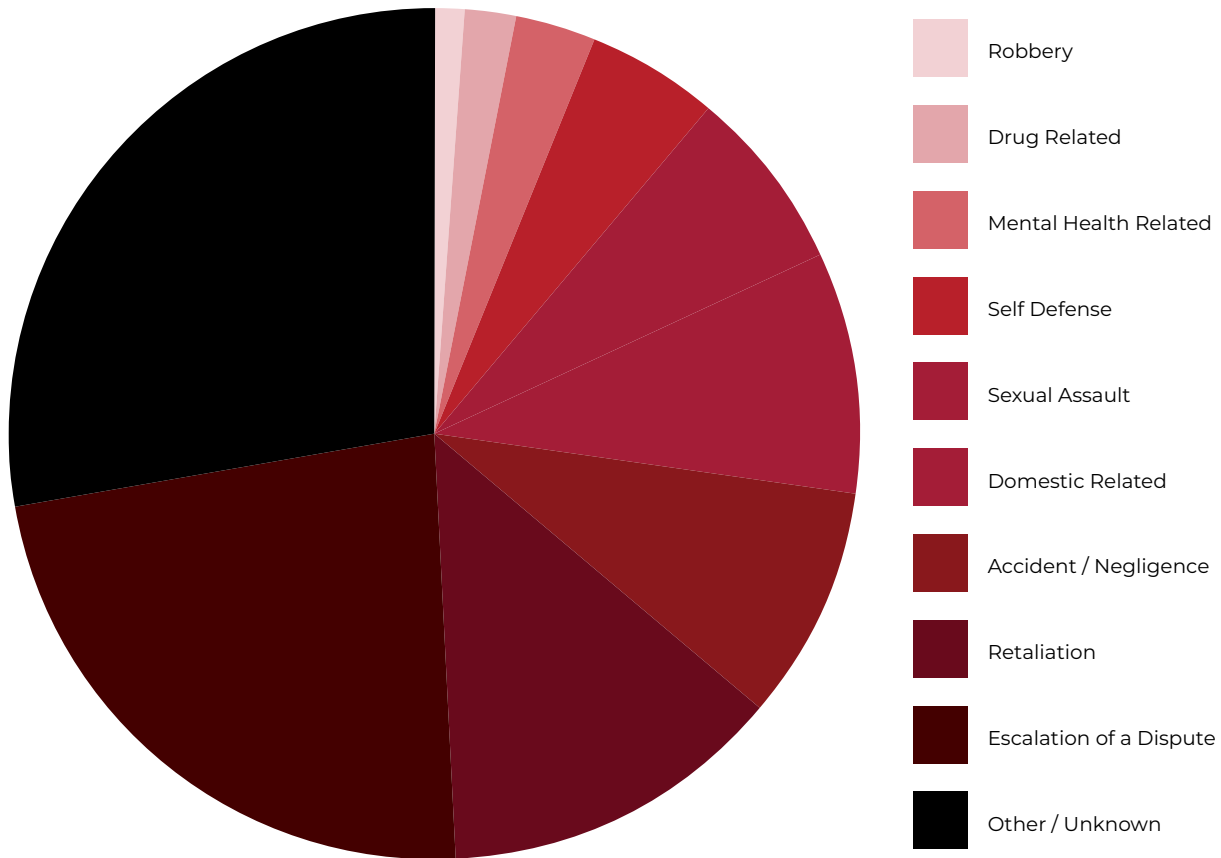
The most common times were morning classes (13.9%), a sporting event (13.1%), and the evening or night (29.9%)

Circumstance

- Overall, 10% of cases involved an active shooter inside the school.
- One third of shootings were pre-planned and two-thirds were spontaneous.
- Ten percent of perpetrators made their plans known ahead of time and 28% of homicides involved an accomplice.
- The most common weapon used was a handgun. Assault weapons were used in 4.3% of shootings.



Circumstances in School Shootings



Recommendations

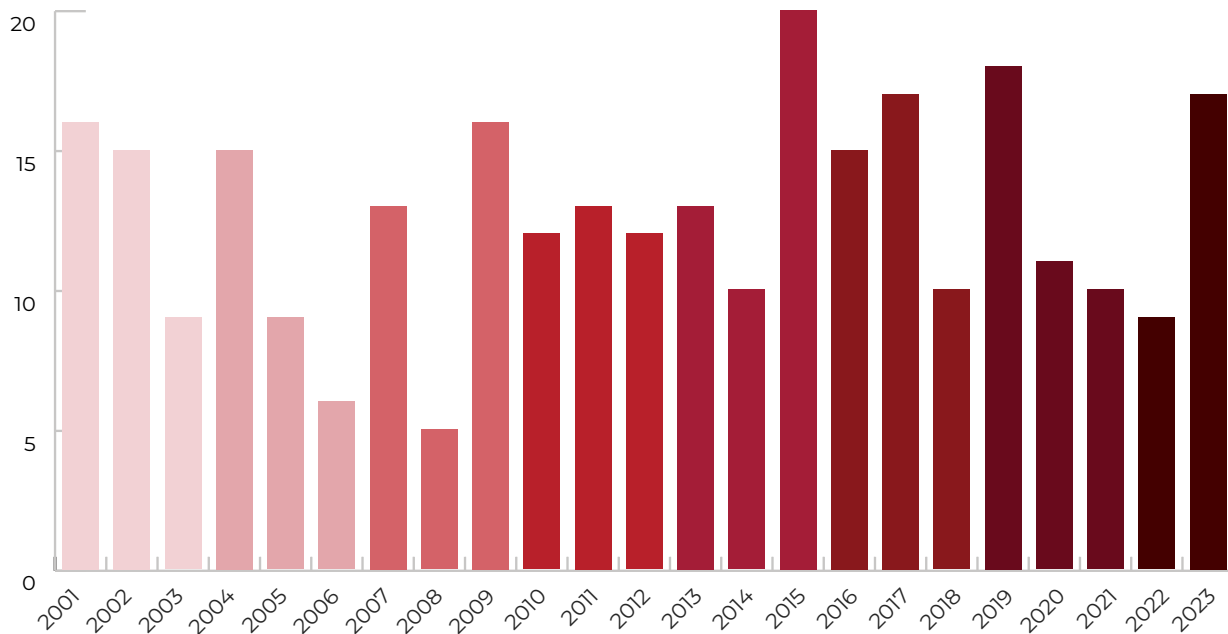
- Most of the active shooters in the database were current students of the school, meaning they are familiar with security procedures. Schools systems for reporting and responding to students in crisis.
- Many homicides occurred in outdoor space, including sports fields, highlighting the need for monitoring and security planning in outdoor school spaces.
- The most common homicide circumstance was a dispute that turned deadly. Dispute resolution training for students as well as limiting dangerous weapons on school grounds may reduce violence.



Higher Education Homicide Database

This database includes any homicide with any weapon, under any circumstance that occurred directly on a college or university campus or within two blocks of campus from 2000 to 2023. The starting point for this database was public Clery Act data reported by colleges and universities. There are 291 incidents in the dataset, with 375 fatalities. We gathered enough information to include 255 of the 291 total cases in the analysis.

Incidents by Year



Location

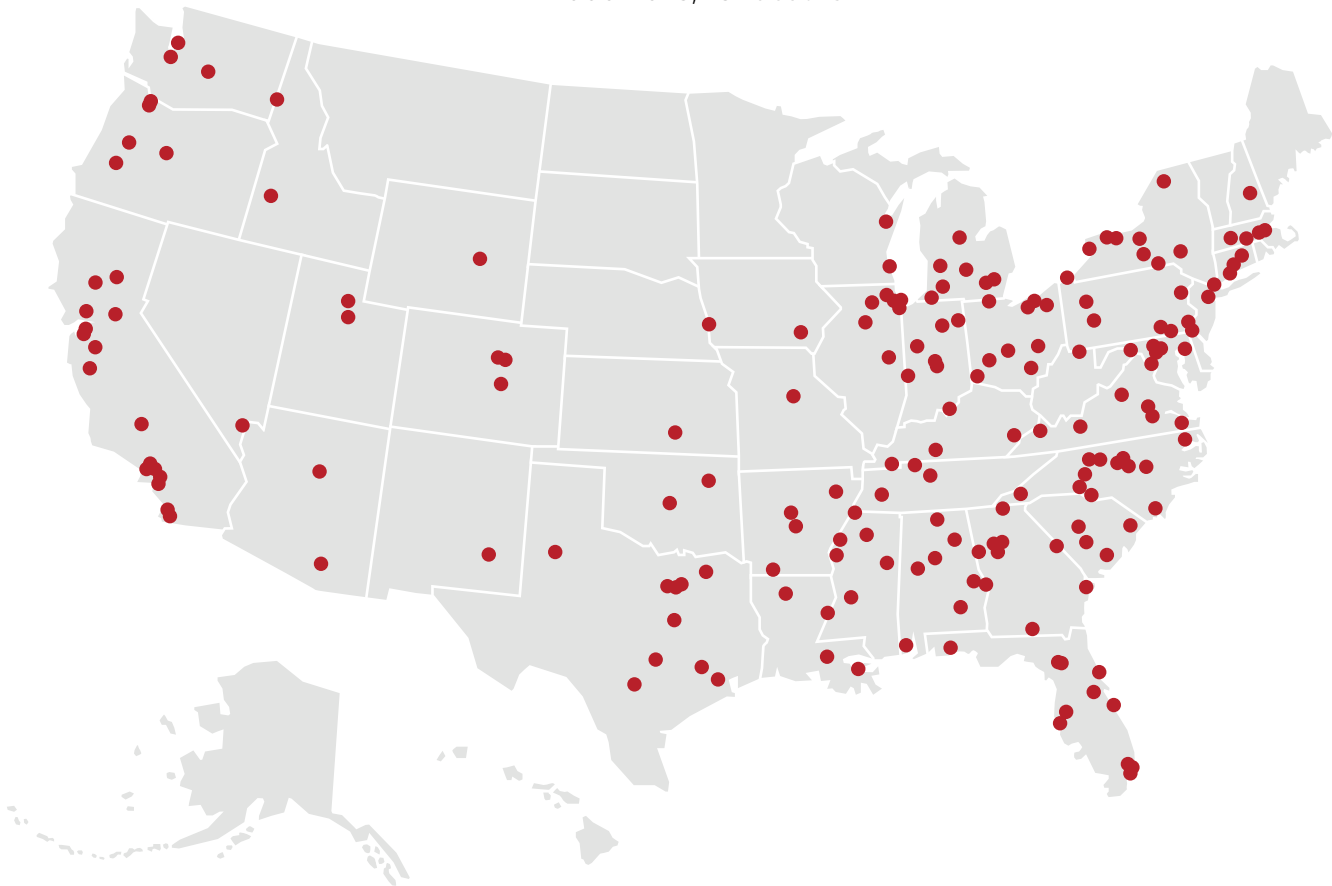
The most common locations for a homicide to take place on campus were outside (23%), in a dorm room (20%), and in a parking lot on campus (17%). Thirteen percent of homicides occurred in a building on campus and 7% occurred in off-campus housing.

Weapons

Firearms were used in 63% of homicides, followed by knives or sharp objects in 18% of homicides, and hands in 12%. The remaining 7% of cases involved other means such as blunt objects, vehicles, or drowning.

Map of Higher Education Homicides

2000-2023, 291 deaths



Circumstances

- Only 6% of homicide cases involved an “active shooter,” defined as “an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area” (FBI, 2024).
- Escalation of a dispute was the most common homicide circumstance (28% of cases), followed by domestic violence (22%).
- Among domestic violence cases, the perpetrator killed their current partner in 33% of cases, their ex-partner in 27% of cases, their child in 22% of cases.
- Robberies accounted for 10% of homicides.
- Very few homicides on college/university campuses had a nexus with gangs (4%), terrorism (2%), hate crimes (3%), or hostage-taking (3%).

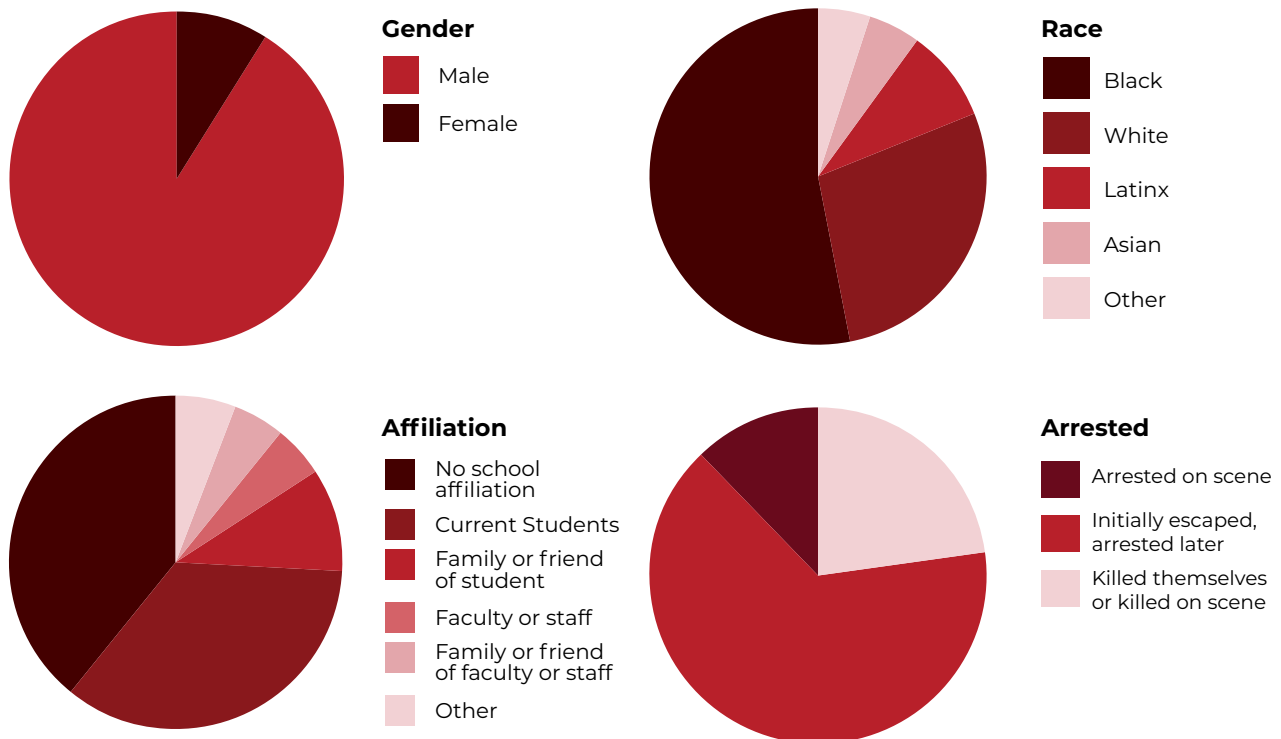
Over half (51%) occurred in urban areas, 35% in suburban, and 14% rural.

Over half (55%) of homicides resulted in at least one student victim and 17% involved at least one faculty or staff victim.

Perpetrators

- Ninety-one percent of perpetrators were male. Their mean age was 22-years-old.
- Over half were Black (53%), 28% were White, 9% Latinx, 5% Asian, and the remainder other races.
- Most perpetrators either had no affiliation with the college/university (39%) or were current students (35%). In 10% of cases, the perpetrator was a family or friend of a student, 5% of cases involved a faculty or staff perpetrator, and an additional 4% of perpetrators were family or friends of a faculty or staff member.
- Most homicide perpetrators were arrested on scene (12%) or initially escaped but were eventually arrested (65%). Thirty percent of perpetrators either killed themselves or were killed on scene.
- Faculty committed the fewest homicides (9%). Faculty were mostly likely to commit homicides that were domestic (35%) or an escalation of a dispute (30%).
- Students committed 45% of homicides on campus with the most common circumstance being domestic (32%) and escalation of dispute (28%).
- Most of the homicides related to psychosis (6 of 7, 86%) and hate (5 of 8, 62.5%) were committed by students.
- Other people on campus committed 46% of homicides. This group was most likely to commit a homicide related to a felony such as a robbery or drug deal (31%).
- Female perpetrators were more likely to commit homicides related to domestic violence. Of the fourteen domestic violence homicides committed by female perpetrators, they killed their newborn child in 71% of cases.

Perpetrator Characteristics





Comparison to K-12 Schools

Compared to shootings on college campuses, K-12 school homicides involved more active shooters and less domestic related homicides and robberies. At K-12 schools, 97% of homicide perpetrators were male compared to 91% on college campus.

College campus perpetrators were more likely to be students of the school (45%) compared to K-12 schools (22%) and were more likely to commit suicide on the scene (30% versus 11% at K-12 schools).

Conclusion

Contrary to the public perception often shaped by high-profile “active shooter” or mass shooting cases, our findings indicate that such events are exceedingly rare in the context of campus homicides. Instead, the majority of incidents are the result of escalations of disputes and domestic violence, suggesting a more complex interplay of factors contributing to campus violence.

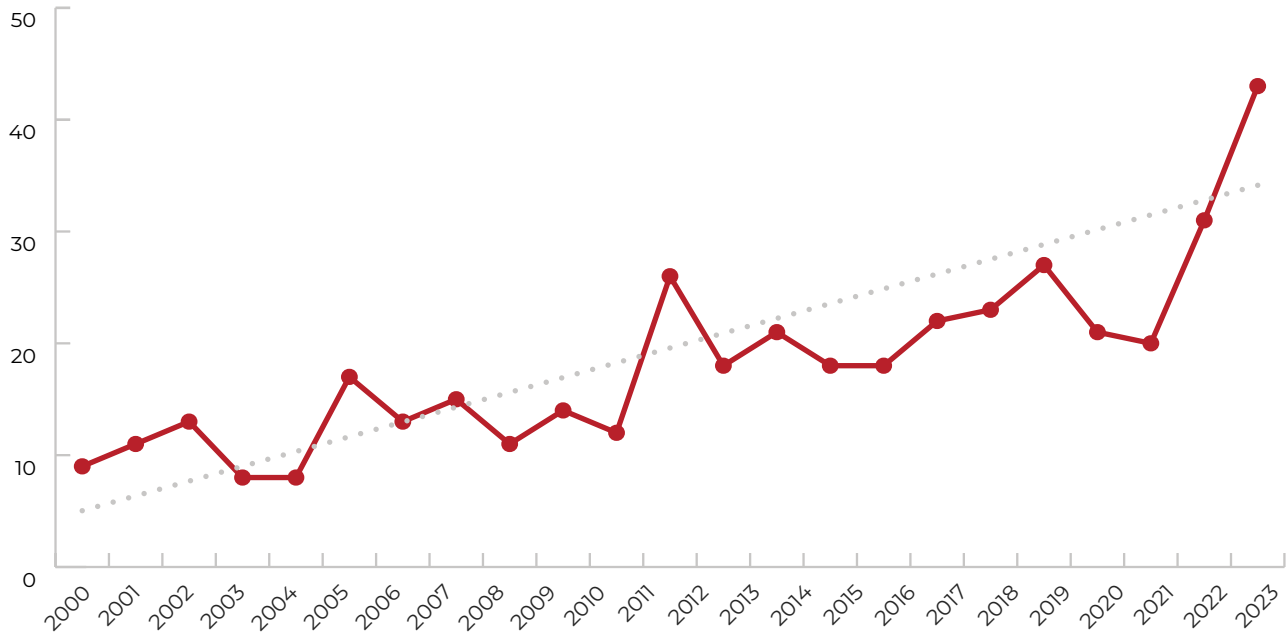
Recommendations

- The number of domestic violence-related homicides, nearly one-fourth of all cases, highlights a critical area for intervention. Enhanced support and resources for victims of domestic violence should include confidential reporting mechanisms, counseling services, and emergency housing. Campuses should also foster awareness and prevention programs.
- With a notable number of homicides occurring in parking lots and outdoor spaces, improving security in these areas through better lighting, increased surveillance, and regular patrols could deter potential perpetrators.
- Implementing programs that teach de-escalation techniques and conflict-resolution skills could address the root causes of dispute-related homicides, equipping students and staff with the tools needed to manage conflicts constructively and reduce the risk of escalation to violence.
- Given that shootings account for a significant majority of campus homicides, moreover, policies aimed at restricting gun carrying on campus could potentially reduce the likelihood of fatal conflicts.



House of Worship Homicide Database

Finally, we built a new House of Worship Homicides database, which aims to fill the significant gaps in existing research by providing a comprehensive analysis of 419 homicide cases across various religious settings over 23 years. This database was built using internet searches, police reports, and smaller existing databases.



Homicides at houses of worship have been steadily increasing over the last two decades, with a marked increase in the past two years.

The slight decline in the number of homicides at houses of worship during 2020 and 2021 likely reflects the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

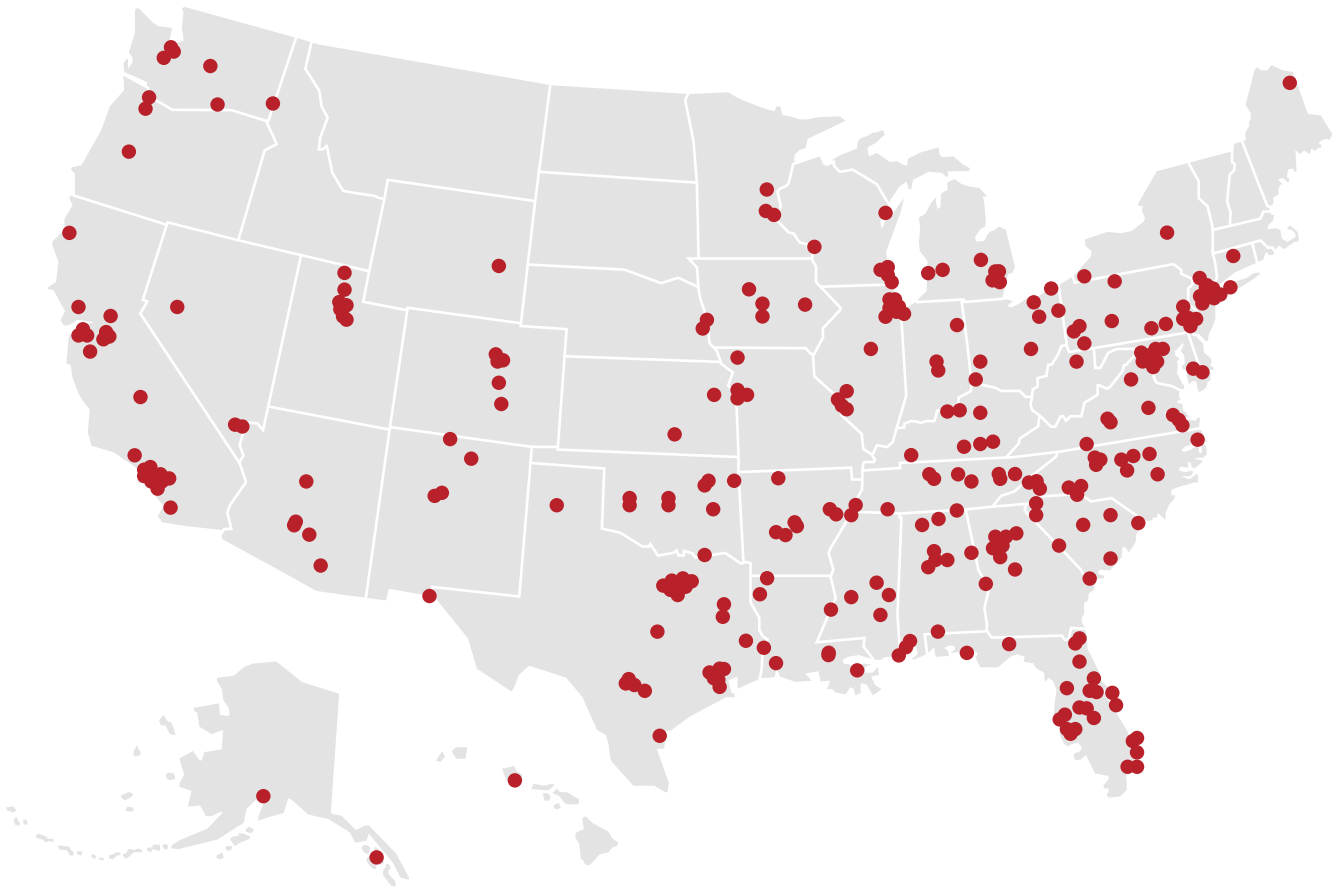
Minnesota Cases

There are four homicides in the databases that occurred at houses of worship in Minnesota.

- 2011 at the Church of Saint Budget in Minneapolis when one victim was killed in a gang-related shooting that occurred in the parking lot.
- 2019 at St. Albans Church of God in Christ in St. Paul when one victim was killed in drive-by shooting after attending church services.
- 2020 at the Church of Scientology in St. Paul when a perpetrator tried to rob an employee at gun point. The perpetrator was killed in self-defense.
- 2021 at the Shiloh Temple International Ministries in Minneapolis when two people were shot, one fatally, during a fight that broke outside of a funeral that was gang-related. The funeral was for another homicide victim.

Map of House of Worship Homicides

2000-2023, 419 deaths



Location

24.8% of homicides occurring inside the building, 43.7% in parking lots, and 23.9% outside on the property. Notably, incidents inside the house of worship were significantly associated with older perpetrators and resulted in a higher number of fatalities.

Denomination

Most homicides at houses of worship occurred within Christian settings, accounting for 96.2% of all cases. Among the hate-motivated cases (n=14), 57.1% targeted Christian institutions. In contrast, Islam-related homicides, though comprising only 0.7% of the total, represented 7.1% of hate-motivated incidents, with a higher average of 2.67 victims per case. Jewish places of worship accounted for 1.9% of all homicides and 35.7% of hate-motivated incidents, with an average of 2.38 victims per incident.

Weapon

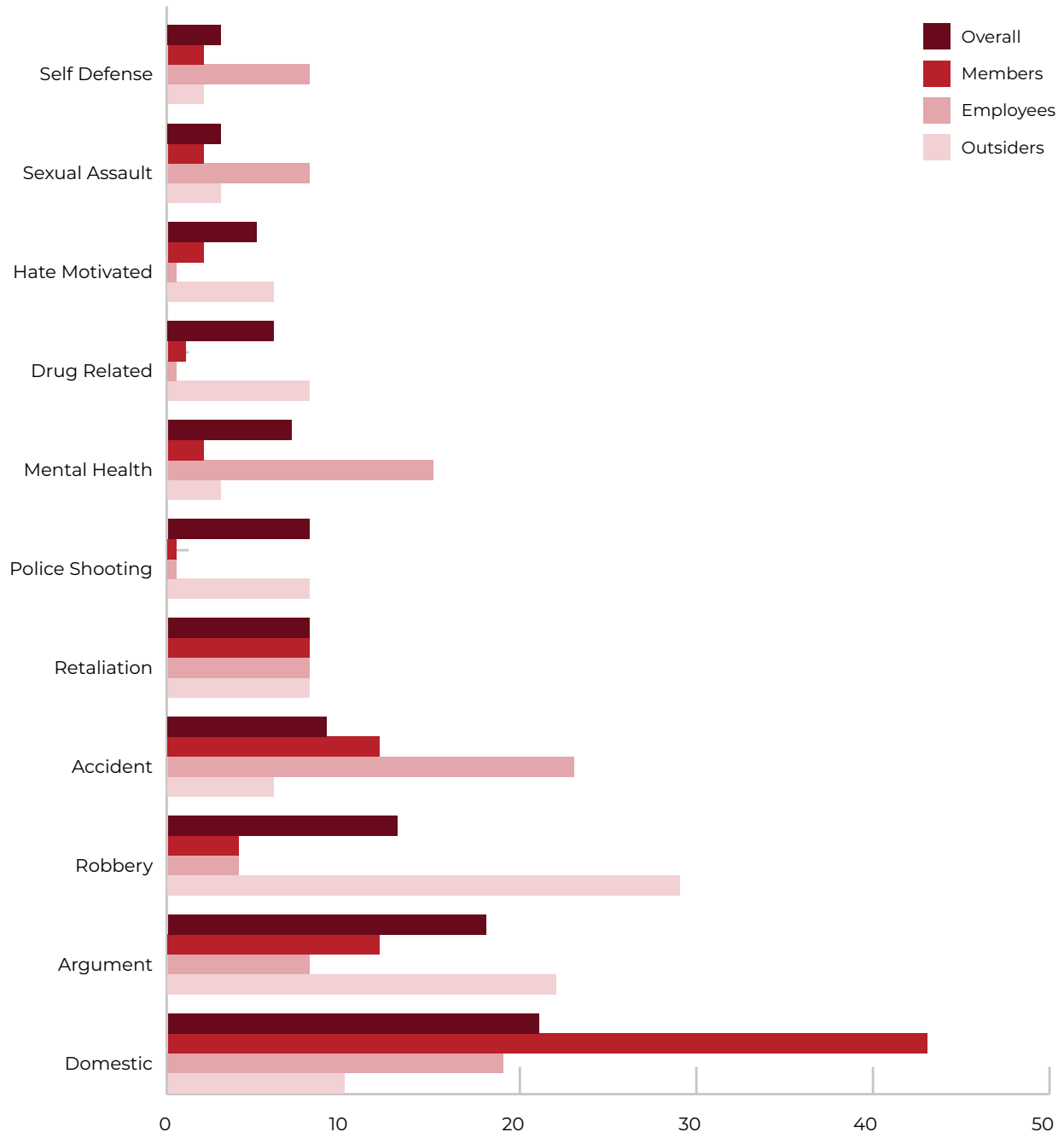
The data highlight the prevalence of firearms as the weapon of choice in house of worship homicides, used in 287 cases (68.7%). Knives were used in 10.5% of the incidents, while physical objects or bodily force accounted for 9.5%.



Perpetrators

- 93.4% of perpetrators were men
- Perpetrators were 41.9% white, 43.5% Black, 9.71% Latinx, and 2.4% Asian
- Most perpetrators were arrested (61.5%), 8.4% killed themselves on the scene
- Mental health issues were noted in 17% of the cases, and these were often associated with older perpetrators and a higher number of fatalities.

Homicide Circumstance and Motivation





Older perpetrators most often had domestic, self-defense, accidental, hate, or mental health motivations, whereas younger perpetrators killed after a robbery, sexual assault, or drug crime.

Overall, perpetrators with domestic motives (63 cases) or personal disputes (80 cases) were common, and these cases frequently involved individuals with known connections to the worship community.

Recommendations

- Comprehensive security measures that extend beyond the interior spaces of these institutions to include their surrounding environments, including increased surveillance and lighting in parking areas, as well as protocols for monitoring and responding to threats in these more vulnerable locations
- Policy measures to combat hate speech and online radicalization
- Reduce access to firearms, particularly for individuals with known histories of violence or are in a crisis.
- Enhance protective measures and support systems for potential victims, particularly those frequenting houses of worship. Religious leaders should be trained to recognize signs of domestic abuse and providing them with resources to effectively intervene and support survivors.
- Tailored training programs for religious leaders and congregants on how to recognize and respond to the signs someone is in crisis and/or intends to harm, including de-escalation techniques and emergency response procedures.



Community Partnerships

This year, the Violence Prevention Project Research Center has worked with the following community partners:

Hennepin County Medical Center (HCMC)

VPPRC has an ongoing collaboration with HCMC hospital system to understand community gun violence better. With this unique partnership, we are constructing an Integrated Firearm Violence Impact Database (IFVID), which will merge clinical trauma registry data, homicide data from The Violence Prevention Project, and community census data. This will allow us to examine the relationship between socio-economic indicators and firearm violence.

Minnesota Violent Death Reporting System Dashboard

We have begun collaborating with Stefan Gingerich who runs the Minnesota Violent Death Reporting System (MNVDRS) dashboard. We are working on getting data sharing agreements in place so that we can compare the MNVDRS data to our Twin Cities homicide database to look for reliability and consistency in datasets, as well as conduct new analysis using both datasets

Minnesota Department of Public Safety

The Commissioner of Public Safety and the Superintendent of the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension reached out to the VPPRC requesting a study of the increase in violence against peace officers in Minnesota, particularly on domestic violence calls (18 officers shot in the last year in Minnesota, which is a marked increase). We have designed the study and will begin analysis once data-sharing agreements have been approved.

Center for Naval Analysis (CNA)

CNA has partnered with the VPPRC to build a database of domestic terrorists using the same methodology as our mass shooter database, funded by the National Institute of Justice. The two databases have now been integrated to examine similarities and differences among mass shooters and domestic terrorists to better inform prevention policy and practice.





Community Events

Key to the Violence Prevention Project Research Center’s mission is not only the collection of data but the disbursement of the data and its key findings to the community so everyone can take action to prevent violence. Last spring, the VPPRC hosted monthly webinars to learn more about the center’s latest research and findings, which are available on-demand.

Mass Shooter Database Research and Findings

January 31, 2024, 486 attendees

This webinar provided an overview of our new research projects and presented new findings on our updated Mass Shooter Database (Version 8.0). This webinar was aimed at policymakers and practitioners, including teachers, school administrators, mental health professionals, medical professionals, security and police, parents, and anyone concerned about gun violence.

College and University Homicides Database Research and Findings

February 28, 2024, 391 attendees

This webinar focused on a brand-new database exploring every homicide that occurred on a college or university campus since the year 2000. Jillian Peterson and James Densley discussed the findings and trends in this new data and their implications for campus security and public safety.

Rise in Twin Cities Homicides During the Pandemic

March 27, 2024, 199 attendees

This webinar discussed new research on the dramatic rise in homicides in the Twin Cities during the years 2020 and 2021. Funded by the Joyce Foundation and in partnership with the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, the Violence Prevention Project analyzed nearly 1,000 perpetrators of homicide from 2018-2023 to look for trends in the data. This webinar will discuss the perpetrators, victims, locations, weapons, and motives of homicide during the pandemic and the implications of these findings for violence prevention efforts.

Gun Violence Exposure Survey Findings

May 1, 2024, 242 attendees

The final webinar of Spring 2024 discussed a new study of gun violence exposure in the United States. The Violence Prevention Project, in partnership with YouGov and Dr. David Pyrooz at the University of Colorado, Boulder, surveyed a nationally representative sample of 10,000 people across the United States. This data sheds new light on the extent of gun violence exposure in this country, including exposure to mass shootings, community gun violence, and domestic violence.





Minnesota Gun Violence Research Summit

November 1, 2024, 8:00 am - 4:00 pm

The Violence Prevention Project is also hosting a community research summit in November. The Minnesota Gun Violence Research Summit is a gathering that brings together practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and community leaders from various sectors across the state. The goal of this summit is to address the issue of gun violence prevention by providing a platform for discussions, presentations, and networking opportunities. Attendees will have the chance to learn about the latest research, share best practices, and explore strategies for reducing gun violence in schools, communities, and homes in Minnesota.

The summit focuses on collaboration, innovation, and evidence-based approaches to finding solutions to gun violence. By fostering dialogue and encouraging actionable solutions, the summit aims to address the root causes of gun violence and shape the future of prevention efforts in the state. Participants are encouraged to use their expertise, resources, and passion to work together towards creating a safer and more resilient Minnesota for everyone.

Minnesota Gun Violence Research Summit Agenda

8:00am	Registration / Welcome	Jillian Peterson
8:30am	Bryan Muelberger	Daughter killed in 2019 Saugus High shooting
8:45am	Opening Address	Jillian Peterson & James Densley
9:30am	Break - refreshments	
9:45am	Panel 1: Schools	Shannon Hill, St. Paul Public Schools Rudy Perez, President of NASRO David Reidman, K-12 School shooting database
10:45am	Break - refreshments	
11:00am	Panel 2: Community	Andrew Evans, Superintendent, BCA David Pyrooz, U Colorado Boulder Brooke Blakey, Office of Neighborhood Safety Rob Door, MN Gun Owners Caucus
12:00pm	Lunch Buffet	Tabletop conversation questions
12:45pm	Tommy McBrayer	Gun violence survivor
1:00pm	Panel 3: Homes	Alicia Nichols, Domestic violence expert Megan Walsh, Gun Violence Prevention Law Clinic Stefan Gingerich, MN Violent Death Dashboard Jordan Haltaufderheid, DPS ERPO
2:00pm	Break - refreshments	
2:15pm	Nicole Hockley	Son killed in Sandy Hook Elementary shooting
2:30pm	Panel 4 – Solutions	Rep Kelly Moller, Chair of Public Safety Derek Lumbard, HCMC Trauma Surgeon Justin Terrell, MN Justice Research Center Lisa Geller, John Hopkins University Angela Davis, Minnesota Public Radio
3:30pm	Wrap up / Networking	



Other Presentations

Minnesota School Safety Center Conference (June 2024)

Normandale Community College, Bloomington, MN

Holistic violence prevention in schools

American Society of Criminology Annual Conference (November 2024)

San Francisco, CA

Gun violence & homicide in the United States: Collaborative, Mixed-method approaches

Extreme Risk Protection Order Workshop, Rand Corp (November 2024)

Washington DC

Evaluating the Suite of New Gun Safety Policies Minnesota Enacted into Law

Recent Publications

Peterson, J., & Densley, J. (2024). Gun violence (and mass shootings). In P. Zapf (Ed.), *APA handbook of forensic psychology (2nd Ed.)*. American Psychological Association.

Peterson, J., Densley, J., Hauf, M., & Moldenhauer, J. (2024). Epidemiology of mass shootings in the United States. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 20*, 125–148. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-081122-010256>.

Peterson, J., Densley, J., Riedman, D., Spaulding, J., & Malicky, H. (2024). An exploration of K-12 school shooting threats in the United States. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management, 11(2)*, 106–120. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tam0000215>.

Peterson, J., & Densley, J. (2023). Mass shootings and mental health in the United States: key dynamics and controversies. In Madfis, E., & Lankford, A. (Eds.), *All American massacre: the tragic role of American culture and society in mass shootings* (pp. 319–336). Temple University Press.

Several new articles have been submitted and are currently under peer-review.



Media Since August 2023

- Georgia officials charge 14-year-old alleged school shooter as an adult, **National Public Radio**, September 7, 2024
- Georgia high school shooting shows how hard it can be to take action even after police see warning signs, **The Conversation**, September 6, 2024
- Accused 14-year-old would be youngest mass shooter since 1998, **Washington Post**, September 5, 2024
- The Daily Report – Deadly shooting rocks Georgia high school, **CBS National News**, September 5, 2024
- What are the root causes of mass shootings like the one in Georgia on Wednesday?, **WCCO Radio**, September 5, 2024
- How to stop mass shootings before they start, **Vox News**, September 5, 2024
- What mass shooters in the United States have in common, **BBC News**, September 5, 2024
- Apalachee High School shooting in Georgia, **CNN with Jim Sciutto**, September 5, 2024
- Nashville school shooter’s writings reignite debate over releasing material written by mass killers, **Associated Press**, July 25, 2023
- New law allows Minnesota students to opt out of shooter drills, **Minnesota Public Radio**, July 28, 2023
- I wept for Ken: Why men have the most to gain from watching Barbie, **The Guardian**, August 1, 2023
- Stopping the next mass shooting, **NACU Podcast**, September 13, 2023
- Real or hoax? Intention of 40% of school shooting threats unknown, **K12 Dive**, September 20, 2023





- Do school resource officers make schools safer? What the evidence says, **MPR News**, September 20, 2023
- Minnesota schools found more guns post-pandemic, **KARE 11**, October 17, 2023
- Psychologist examines genesis of online groups of sexually embittered men, why some turn violent, **The Harvard Gazette**, October 18, 2023
- Modern day machine guns: switch devices are making guns deadlier than ever, **Star Tribune**, October 18, 2023
- A guide to understanding mass shootings in America, **The Trace**, October 26, 2023
- Maine mass shooting is America's 8th, and deadliest, this year, **New York Times**, October 26, 2023
- Author of 'The Violence Project' discusses mass shooting in Maine, **WGN News Chicago**, October 27, 2023
- Mental illness and mass shootings, **MSNBC**, October 27, 2023
- Red Flag Laws are the answer, **Bloomberg News**, October 27, 2023
- Dire warnings about Maine gunman didn't stop his rampage, **MSN**, October 31, 2023
- Criminologist answers true crime questions from Twitter, **Wired Tech Support**, October 31, 2023
- Maine gunman is the latest mass shooter with a military background. Experts explain the connection, **CBS News**, October 31, 2023
- Yes, it's getting worse: New data shows mass shootings are more frequent, **Marshall Project**, November 1, 2023



- The signs were all there. Why did no one stop the Maine shooter? **New York Times**, November 2, 2023
- Can these scientists stop America's next mass shooting? **The Times UK**, November 11, 2023
- Police say 17-year old killed sixth grader, wounded five in Perry, Iowa school shooting, **Associated Press**, January 4, 2024
- Dylan Butler transgender claims flood social media, **Newsweek**, January 5, 2024
- 17-year-old behind shooting at Iowa school: Why are more adolescents picking up guns in the US?, **First Post**, January 5, 2024
- Live interview, **BBC News**, February 15, 2024
- Big business thinks mass shootings aren't its problem. It's wrong, **Bloomberg**, February 16, 2024
- School shooters: How to stop the madness. A Dr. Phil news special, **TBN**, February 16, 2024



- Young victims, young suspects: the Kansas City shooting and gun violence, **New York Times**, February 17, 2024
- Suspect in shooting of Burnsville officers and medic had violent past, lost right to own guns, **Star Tribune**, February 19, 2024
- Houston church shooting revives claims on transgender shooters. Evidence shows they're false, **USA Today**, February 21, 2024
- BCA: 'Disturbance' calls often most volatile for law enforcement officers, **Minnesota Public Radio**, February 23, 2024
- New data shows assaults, weapons reports up in MN schools, **Kare-11 News**, March 13, 2024
- 3 more people are charged in connection with the Super Bowl victory rally shooting, **National Public Radio**, March 24, 2024
- Meet the Minnesota researchers working to prevent another mass shooting, **MPR News**, April 11, 2024
- How Columbine shaped 25 years of school safety, **Education Week**, April 17, 2024
- 25 years of healing: How six Columbine survivors found life after trauma, **Women's Health**, April 19, 2024
- 25 years later, the trauma of the Columbine high school shooting is still with us, **USA Today**, April 20, 2024
- 'Straw' gun buyers often women in abusive relationships, **Star Tribune**, May 24, 2024
- Cops apologize after surprise active shooter drill terrifies students, **Newsweek**, June 8, 2024
- A Tangled Web (Season 14, Episode 31), **Fatal Attraction**, June 17, 2024
- A divisive icon behind Trump's attempted assassination: the AR-15, **Wall Street Journal**, July 15, 2024
- Gun violence researcher unpacks Trump rally shooting, **CBS News**, July 15, 2024
- What so many high profile shootings have in common, **Vox**, July 17, 2024
- AR-15s are used in America's deadliest shootings. Why is it so hard for police to defend against them? **The Trace**, July 18, 2024
- Mass shooters and political assassins often have similar profiles, expert says, **90.5 WESA**, July 18, 2024



- The “fight, fight, fight” edition, **Slate Political Gabfest Podcast**, July 18, 2024
- From honors student to the gunman who tried to kill Donald Trump, **New York Times**, July 19, 2024
- Reporter’s notebook: Covering the attempted assassination of Donald Trump, **90.5 WESA**, July 19, 2024
- Inside the mind of an American shooter, **i news**, July 20, 2024
- Gunman at Trump rally flew drone over fairgrounds earlier on day of shootings, **The Guardian**, July 20, 2024
- Donald Trump’s shooter requested a day off from work — citing a really vague reason, **Inquisitr**, July 20, 2024
- A 20-year-old’s perplexing place in the catalogue of American gunmen, **Washington Post**, July 21, 2024
- Trump assassination bid puts spotlight on US gun violence, **Voice of America**, July 22, 2024
- Lack of motive, past writings puts Trump rally gunman in rare class among high-profile shooters, **Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**, August 11, 2024
- There have been three mass shootings in the U.S. this year, **New York Times**, September 4, 2024
- Security alerts at Apalachee helped save lives, officials say, **Washington Post**, September 6, 2024





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Report to the
Minnesota Legislature
January 2025