SANDAG

Brief

CJ

San Diego Crime Victims and Suspects in 2021

NOVEMBER 2022

Research findings from the Criminal Justice Clearinghouse

Introduction

This SANDAG CJ Brief is intended to provide a broad picture of victims affected by violent and property crime in the San Diego region. An examination of crime in a community is incomplete without information about the victims and suspects involved. In this brief, victim and suspect characteristics are analyzed by crime type, with a focus on which subgroups of the region's population was more at risk for victimization. Homicide data were compiled from local law enforcement agencies and other crime data were compiled from the Automated Regional Justice Information System (ARJIS). These data describe the characteristics of individuals who reported being a victim of a Part I violent crime (homicide, rape, robbery, or aggravated assault) or a property crime (burglary, larceny, or motor vehicle theft) in 2021. Suspect data, which was gathered at the time of the crime incident and prior to any litigation, is also presented in this report.

In total, data is presented for 13,187 violent and 45,350 property crime victims, along with 14,198 violent and 32,043 property crime suspects.[1] When examining the data, it is important to remember that only two in five (40%) violent crimes and about one in three (34%) property crimes get reported and this rate varies by crime type, with the lowest report rating at 23% for sexual assault crimes.[2] While reasons for not reporting vary, they include fear of retaliation or getting the offender in trouble, dealing with the crime another way, not viewing the crime as important enough to report, and lack of confidence the police would or could help.

Highlights

In 2021, Black individuals were more likely than any other group to be a violent crime victim, as well as a violent crime suspect, given their proportion in the population (5% of the population, 14% of violent crime victims, and 25% of violent crime suspects).

Individuals between 25 and 39 were represented twice as many violent crime victims and almost as many violent crime suspects, compared to their proportion of the County's population.

Among the 118 homicides in 2021, adults between 25 and 39 years old were most at risk, assailants usually knew their victims, and arguments were the most common motive.

Female homicide victims were more likely to be older and to be in a romantic relationship with the homicide suspect.

Firearms were the most frequently used weapons (59%) in homicides in 2021, followed by a knife or sharp object (18%).

---

[1] These numbers are based on reports made by law enforcement agencies and were compiled by the Automated Regional Justice Information System (ARJIS) division at SANDAG.
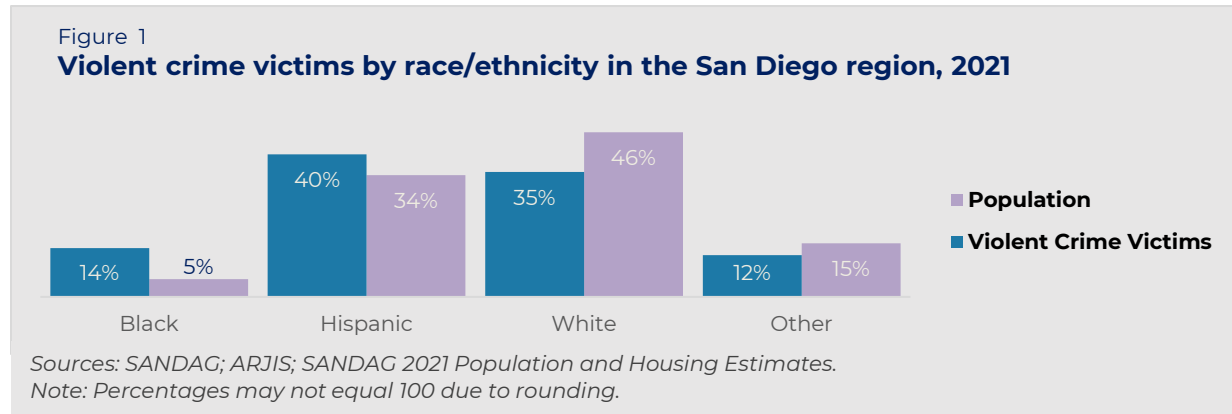[2] Morgan, R. E. & Thompson, A.. (2021). *Criminal Victimization, 2020* (NCJ 301775). Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics. https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/criminal-victimization-2020.

2021 Violent Crime Victim Characteristics

This section looks at the demographics of violent crime victims reported in 2021. Violent crimes were analyzed overall and by four individual categories: homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.

RACE/ETHNICITY OF VIOLENT CRIME VICTIMS

The racial/ethnic characteristics of violent crime victims differed somewhat compared to their representation in the San Diego region. Compared to their proportion of the population, Black individuals were nearly three times more likely to be a victim of a violent crime (5% versus 14%). Hispanic individuals were also overrepresented among violent crime victims, though to a lesser degree (34% versus 40%). Conversely, White individuals and individuals of other races and ethnicities were underrepresented as violent crime victims (46% versus 35% and 15% and 12%, respectively) (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Violent crime victims by race/ethnicity in the San Diego region, 2021

Sources: SANDAG; ARJIS; SANDAG 2021 Population and Housing Estimates.
Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Black individuals were overrepresented as victims in all violent crime types, compared to their proportion of the population. They were over five times as likely to be a victim of homicide, three times more likely to be a victim of aggravated assault, and about two times as likely to be a victim of rape and robbery in 2021. Hispanic individuals comprised a similar proportion of rape victims as their representation in the population, but were overrepresented in the three other categories. White individuals were underrepresented in all crime categories, except for rape. Individuals of other races and ethnicities were also underrepresented in all categories, except for robbery (Table 1).

Table 1
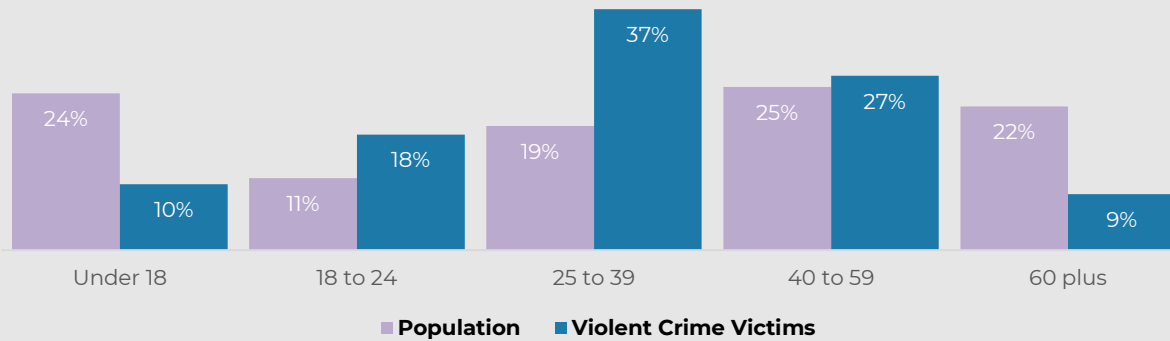**Violent crime type by victims' race/ethnicity in the San Diego region, 2021**

Race/ Ethnicity	Population	Homicide	Rape	Robbery	Aggravated Assault
Black	5%	27% ▲	12% ▲	10% ▲	15% ▲
Hispanic	34%	38% ▲	33% -	42% ▲	40% ▲
White	46%	27% ▼	45% -	32% ▼	35% ▼
Other	15%	8% ▼	10% ▼	15% -	11% ▼

▲: demographic overrepresented; ▼: demographic underrepresented; -: demographic equally represented -/+ 1%;
Sources: SANDAG; ARJIS; SANDAG 2021 Population and Housing Estimates; 2021 Homicide Supplemental report.
Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding. Homicide data are gathered from Law Enforcement Supplementals from 2021.

AGE AND VIOLENT CRIME TYPE

Victims of crime varied by age. Young adults 18 to 24, adults from 25 to 39 years old, and adults from 40 to 59 years old were overrepresented as violent crime victims; compared to their proportion of the population, with adults 25 to 39 almost twice as likely to be victims (19% versus 37%) (Figure 2). This overrepresentation held true across almost all crime categories for these three age groups except homicide for the 18 to 24 age group (Table 2). Individuals 60 years and older were underrepresented among violent crime victims. Children and teens under the age of 18 were also less likely to be victims. Young adults between the age of 18 and 24 years were the most overrepresented among rape victims, with nearly three times as many victims compared to their population.

Figure 2
Violent crime victims by age in the San Diego region, 2021

Sources: SANDAG; ARJIS; SANDAG 2021 Population and Housing Estimates.
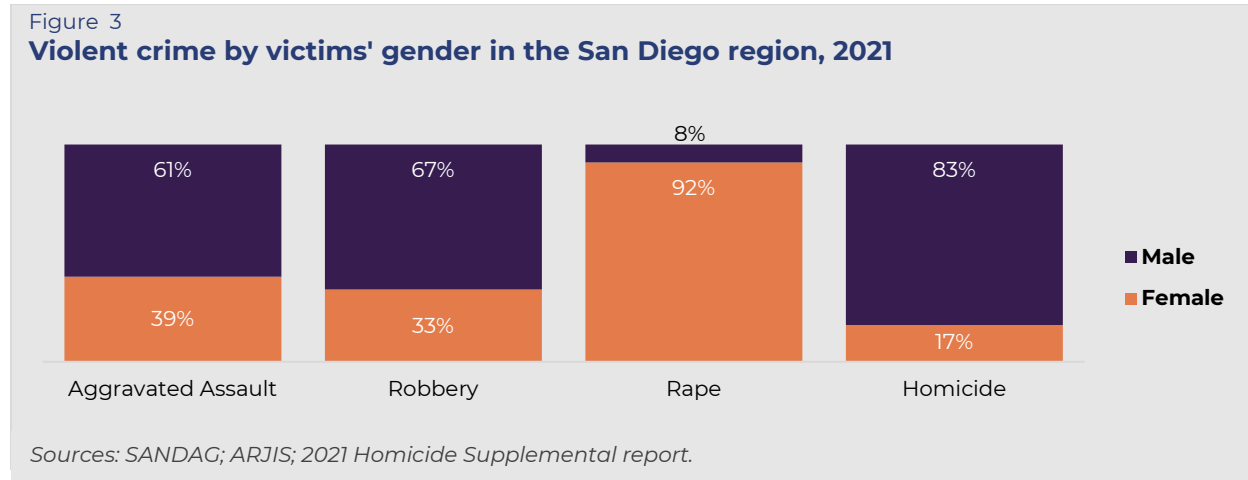*Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.*

Table 2
Violent crime type by victims' age in the San Diego region, 2021

Age	Population	Homicide	Rape	Robbery	Aggravated Assault
Under 18	24%	8% ▾	19% ▾	6% ▾	10% ▾
18 to 24	11%	11% -	31% ▴	20% ▴	16% ▴
25 to 39	19%	37% ▴	33% ▴	37% ▴	37% ▴
40 to 59	25%	32% ▴	14% ▾	27% ▴	28% ▴
60+	22%	12% ▾	3% ▾	10% ▾	9% ▾

▴: demographic overrepresented; ▾: demo. underrepresented; -: demo. equally represented -/+ 1%;
Sources: SANDAG; ARJIS; SANDAG 2021 Population and Housing Estimates; 2021 Homicide Supplemental report.
Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding. All homicide data are gathered from Law Enforcement Supplementals for 2021.

GENDER AND VIOLENT CRIME TYPE

While female and male individuals each represent half of the population in the region, female individuals comprised 41% of all violent crime victims and were underrepresented in all categories except rape. Specifically, female individuals comprised over nine out of ten (92%) of all rape victims, around one in three of robbery and aggravated assault victims, and 17% of homicide victims (Figure 3).[3]

Figure 3
Violent crime by victims' gender in the San Diego region, 2021

	Aggravated Assault	Robbery	Rape	Homicide
Male	61%	67%	8%	83%
Female	39%	33%	92%	17%

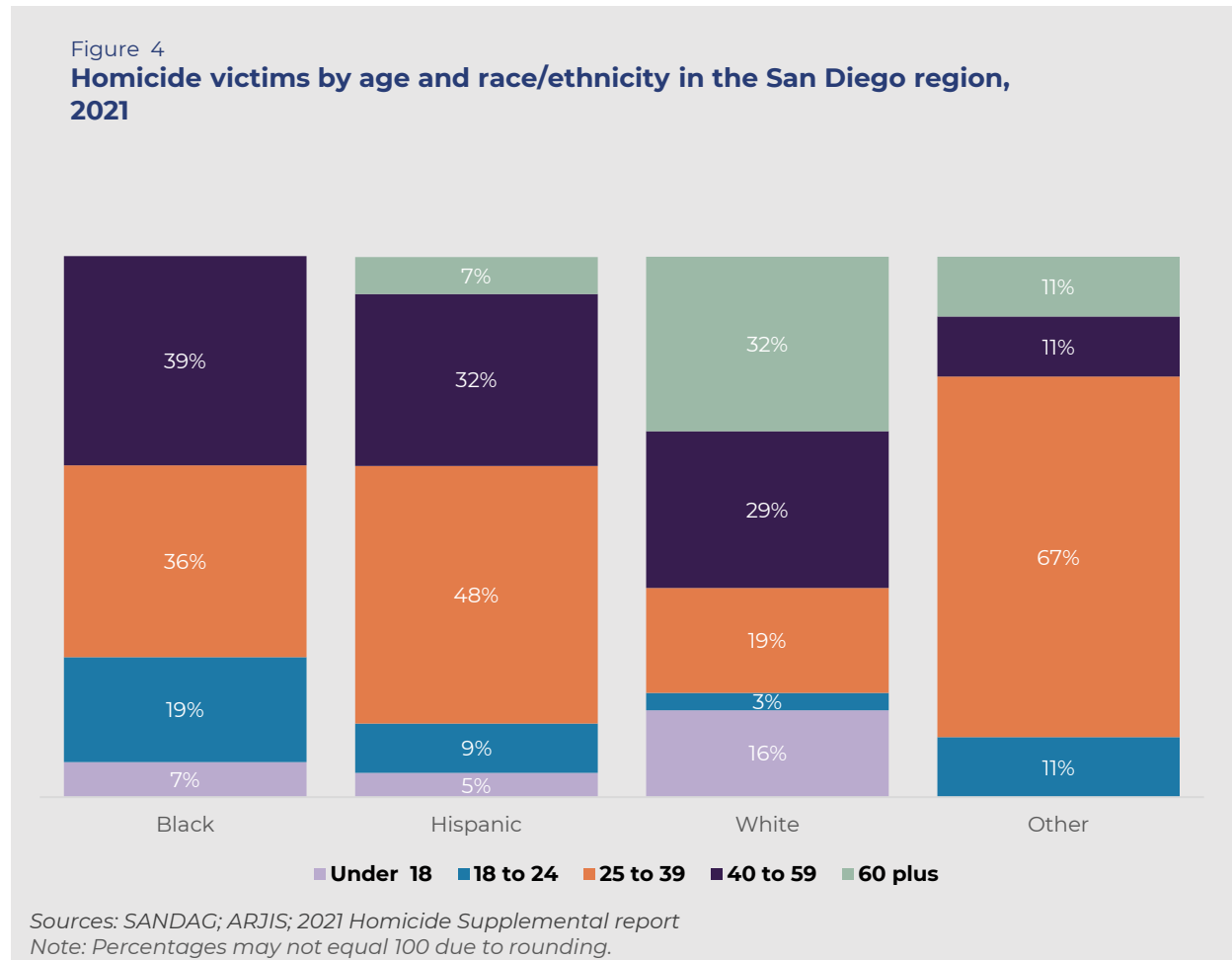Sources: SANDAG; ARJIS; 2021 Homicide Supplemental report.

---

[3] Two robbery victims were described as nonbinary and 129 violent crime victims did not have a gender reported.

2021 Homicide Victim Characteristics

Given the seriousness and devastating impact of homicide, additional analysis is provided on the characteristics of homicide victims. In 2021, there were 118 reported homicides in the San Diego region. Eighty-four (or 71%) of these homicides had identified a motive at the time of this report.

RACE/ETHNICITY AND AGE

Like other violent crimes, a homicide victim's race/ethnicity and age often differed from their overall proportion in the general population. White homicide victims had both the largest proportion of victims over 60 (32%) and victims under the age of 18 (16%). None of the Black homicide victims were older than 59. Among individuals of Other races/ethnicities, no victims were younger than 18 and more than half (67%) of victims were between 25 and 39 years (Figure 4).

Figure 4
Homicide victims by age and race/ethnicity in the San Diego region, 2021

Sources: SANDAG; ARJIS; 2021 Homicide Supplemental report
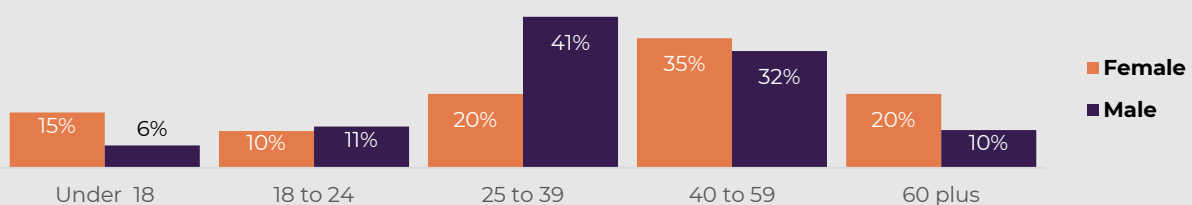*Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.*

GENDER, AGE, RACE, AND MOTIVE

Female homicide victims in 2021 were more likely to be younger than 18 or older than 40, compared to male victims (Figure 5). They were also more likely to be White or Other race/ethnicity (Figure 6) and were far more likely to be a victim of domestic violence or child abuse (Figure 7). Reported male victims, on the other hand, were more likely to be 25 to 39 (Figure 5), Black or Hispanic (Figure 6), and a victim of an argument or gang-related homicide (Figure 7).
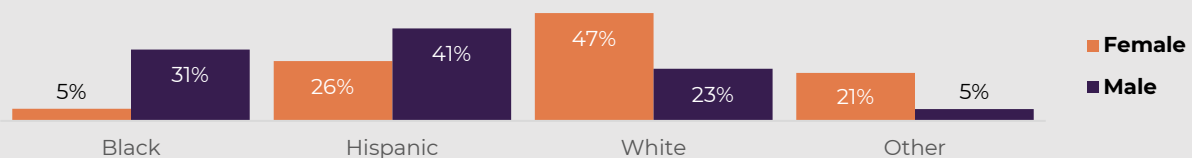
Overall, arguments were the most frequent precipitating event (42%). Gang involvement accounted for over 1 in 5 homicides (23%) with known motives. The frequency of domestic violence being reported as a motive in 2021 was significantly lower compared to the last bulletin from 2019 (8% compared to 32%). Robbery was reported as a motive 8% of the time, and child abuse, lovers triangles, institutional killings, and Other motives (i.e., burglary or arson) were each reported 5% of the time.

Figure 5
Homicide by gender and age in the San Diego region, 2021
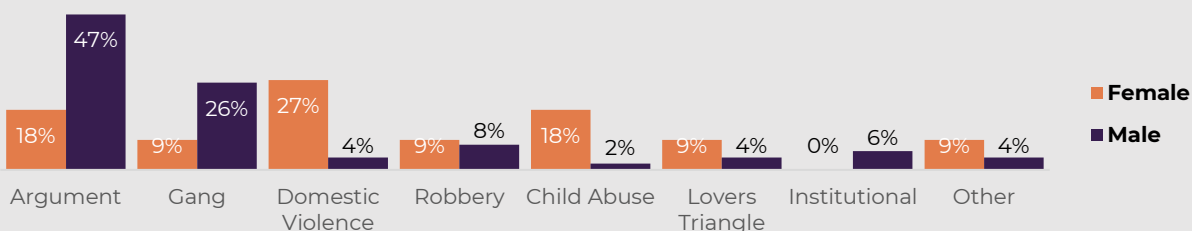

Sources: SANDAG; ARJIS; 2021 Homicide Supplemental report

Figure 6
Homicide victims by gender and race/ethnicity in the San Diego region, 2021

Sources: SANDAG; ARJIS; 2021 Homicide Supplemental report
Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Figure 7
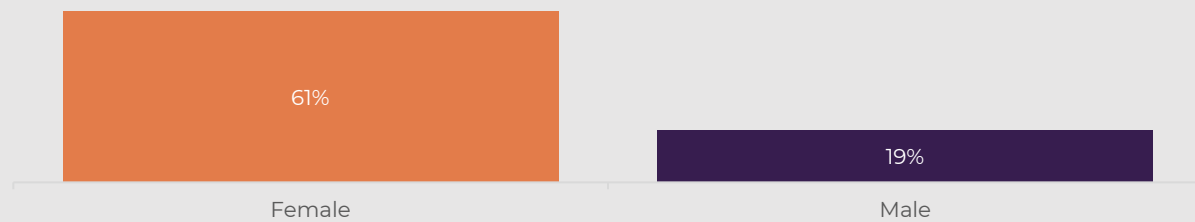**Homicide victims by gender and motive in the San Diego region, 2021**

Sources: SANDAG; ARJIS; 2021 Homicide Supplemental report
Note: Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

HOMICIDE VICTIM'S RELATIONSHIP WITH SUSPECT

In cases where the relationship between homicide victim and suspect was known (87 cases), three out of five (61%) female homicides, the suspect was a family member (i.e., spouse, parent, or intimate partner) (Figure 8). The known suspect was a family member for only one in five (19%) male homicide victims.

Figure 8
Percent of homicide victims by gender whose assailant was a family member
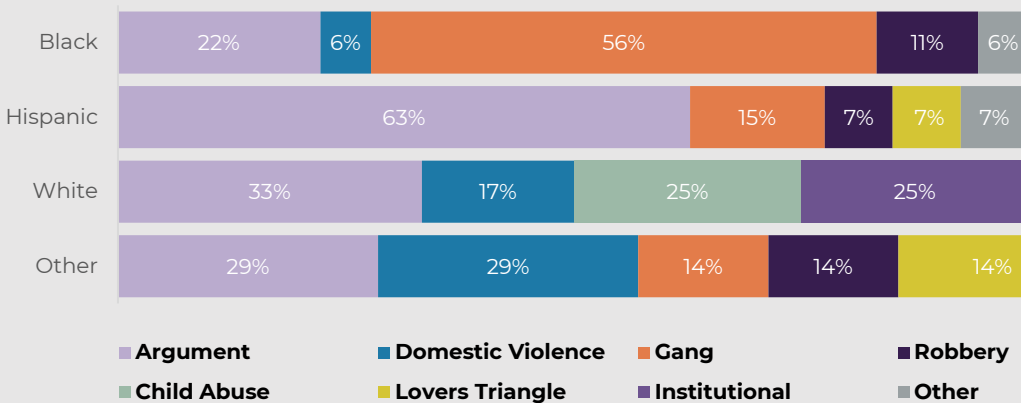
Female	61%
Male	19%

Sources: SANDAG; ARJIS; 2021 Homicide Supplemental report

HOMICIDE MOTIVE BY RACE/ETHNICITY

A review of motive by race/ethnicity showed variation in the precipitating event. Gang involvement was the most prevalent motive for Black homicide victims (56%), while arguments were the most frequent reasons for Hispanic (63%) and White (33%) victims. Domestic violence and arguments were the most frequent reason for victims of Other races and ethnicities (each 29%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9
Homicide motives by race/ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Argument	Domestic Violence	Gang	Robbery	Child Abuse	Lovers Triangle	Institutional	Other
Black	22%	6%	56%	11%				6%
Hispanic	63%		15%	7%		7%		7%
White	33%	17%			25%		25%	
Other	29%	29%	14%	14%		14%		

Sources: SANDAG; ARJIS; 2021 Homicide Supplemental report
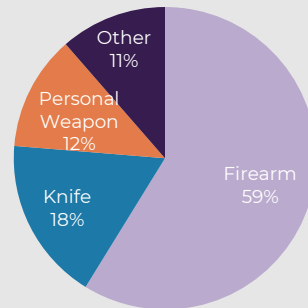*Note:* Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

WEAPONS USED IN HOMICIDES

Firearms were the most frequently used weapon (59%) in homicides in 2021, followed by a knife/sharp object (18%) (Figure 10). When examined by motive, all (100%) gang related homicides involved a firearm, as did about two-thirds (60%) of robberies, half (48%) of fatal arguments, and one-fourth (25%) of domestic violence homicides (Figure 11).

Weapons used in homicides in the San Diego region, 2021

- Firearm 59%
- Knife 18%
- Personal Weapon 12%
- Other 11%

Sources: SANDAG; ARJIS; 2021 Homicide Supplemental report

Figure 11
Homicides involving a firearm by motive in the San Diego region, 2021

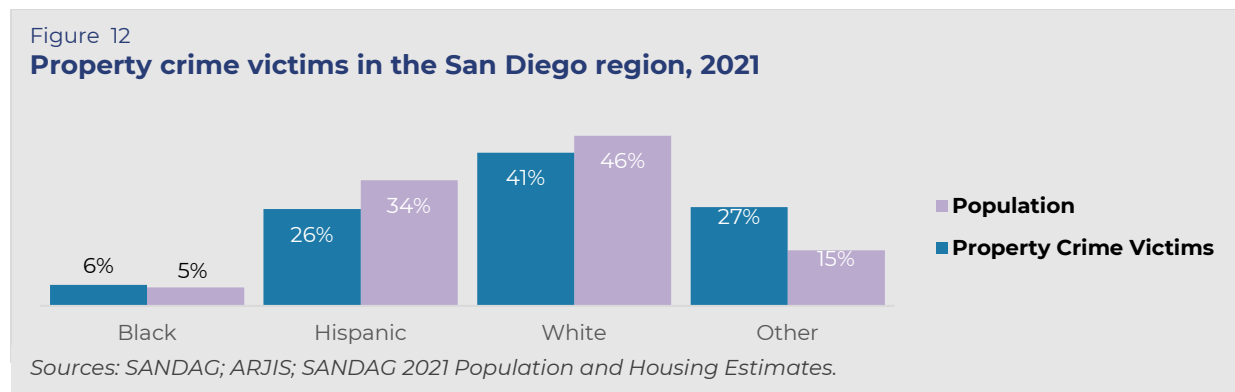| 100% gang involved | 60% robbery | 48% argument | 25% domestic violence |

2021 Property Crime Victim Characteristics

This section looks at the demographics of property crime victims reported in 2021. Property crimes were analyzed cumulatively and by three individual categories: burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft.

RACE/ETHNICITY OF PROPERTY CRIME VICTIMS

Characteristics of property crime victims differed from those of violent crime, with White and Black victims similarly represented to their proportion in the population. However, Hispanics were underrepresented, while victims from Other races and ethnicities were overrepresented (Figure 12). It is important to note fewer individuals report property crimes (33%) than violent (40%),[4] and only the characteristics of one victim is reported, even though there may have been multiple victims in one household (e.g., a residential burglary). Accordingly, this may skew the data.

Figure 12
Property crime victims in the San Diego region, 2021

Sources: SANDAG; ARJIS; SANDAG 2021 Population and Housing Estimates.

PROPERTY CRIME TYPE BY RACE/ETHNICITY

When considering race/ethnicity and type of property crime, individuals who identified as an Other race or ethnicity were overrepresented in all property crime types. This overrepresentation is especially true among motor vehicle theft victims, where individuals were almost two times more likely to be victims (Table 3). Conversely, Hispanic victims were underrepresented in almost all categories, except motor vehicle theft. Motor vehicle theft was the only category where White victims were underrepresented, compared to their proportion in the population (Table 3).

---

[4] Morgan, R. E. & Thompson, A.. (2021). *Criminal Victimization, 2020* (NCJ 301775). Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics. https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/criminal-victimization-2020.

Table 3
Property crime type by victims' race/ethnicity in the San Diego region, 2021

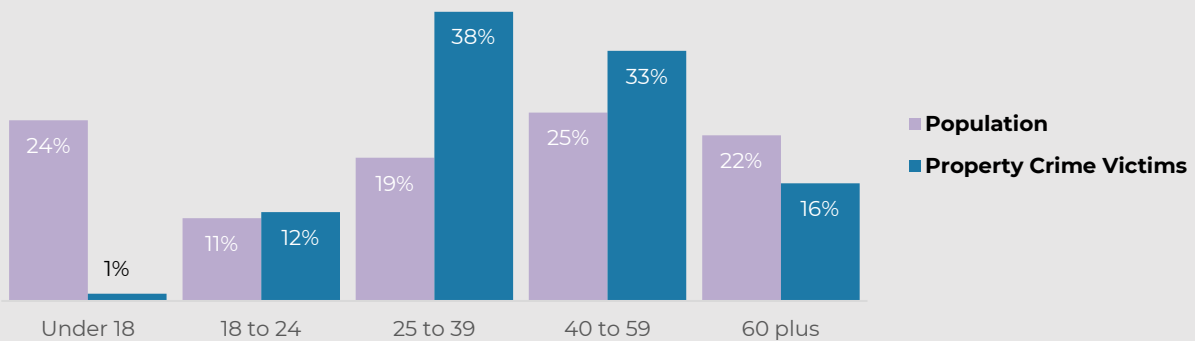| Race/ Ethnicity	Population	Burglary	Larceny	Motor Vehicle Theft
Black	5%	6% -	5% -	6% -
Hispanic	34%	24% ▾	22% ▾	37% ▲
White	46%	45% -	45% -	29% ▾
Other	15%	24% ▲	27% ▲	29% ▲

▲: *demographic overrepresented;* ▾: *demo. underrepresented;* -: *demo. equally represented -/+ 1%;*
Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.
Sources: SANDAG; ARJIS; SANDAG 2021 Population and Housing Estimates

PROPERTY CRIME TYPE BY AGE

The variation in age and property crime victimization tracks with what we know about an individual's progression in life. Not surprising given their dependency on adults, children and youth were extremely unlikely to be reported victims of property crime and were underrepresented compared to their proportion in the population. Adults aged 25 to 39 and 40 to 59 were overrepresented compared to their proportion in the population (Figure 13). While underrepresented, the proportion for property crime victims 60 years and older was almost twice their representation of violent crime victims (9%). This pattern was the same when examined by type of property crime victimization (Table 4).

Figure 13
Property crime victims by age in the San Diego region, 2021

Sources: SANDAG; ARJIS; SANDAG 2021 Population and Housing Estimates.
Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Table 4
Property categories by victims' age in the San Diego region, 2021

Age	Population	Burglary	Larceny	Motor Vehicle Theft
Under 18	24%	1% ▾	1% ▾	<1% ▾
18 to 24	11%	13% ▴	11% -	12% -
25 to 39	19%	40% ▴	37% ▴	38% ▴
40 to 59	25%	32% ▴	32% ▴	35% ▴
60 plus	22%	15% ▾	17% ▾	15% ▾

▴: demographic overrepresented; ▾: demo. underrepresented; -: demo. equally represented -/+ 1%;
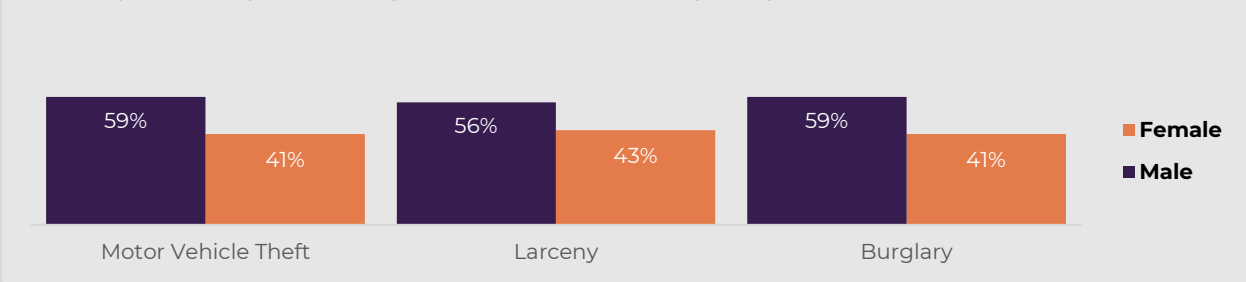Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.
Sources: ARJIS; SANDAG 2021 Population and Housing Estimates.

GENDER AND PROPERTY CRIME TYPE

Males were again overrepresented as victims, comprising 58% of all property crime victims. This overrepresentation was about the same for all property crime types (Figure 14). As with all property crime victims, the characteristics may reflect the person who reports the crime.[5]

Figure 14
Property crime by victims' gender in the San Diego region, 2021

Motor Vehicle Theft: Male 59%, Female 41%
Larceny: Male 56%, Female 43%
Burglary: Male 59%, Female 41%

■ Female
■ Male

Sources: SANDAG; ARJIS.
Notes: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

---

[5] Twenty-four (24) property crime victims were reported as nonbinary, and 261 property crime victims did not have a gender reported.

2021 Violent Crime Suspect Characteristics

Because property crime suspects are less likely to be known, only characteristics of violent crime suspects are presented. As with victim's data, suspect characteristics varied by crime type. Suspects were more likely to be younger, Black or Hispanic, and male. Specifically, suspects between the ages of 18 to 24 were twice as overrepresented across nearly all crime types except for aggravated assaults where they were still overrepresented but to a lesser degree. Similarly, suspects between the ages of 25 to 39 were over twice as overrepresented across nearly all crime types except homicide where they were slightly overrepresented.

Suspects identified as Black were four to six times more likely to be identified as a suspect than their representation in the population. Suspects identified as Hispanic were also overrepresented as suspects in all types of crime. When presenting these data, it would be remiss to not acknowledge the plethora of research and statistics on racial overrepresentation and disparities in the United States criminal justice system contributing to these disproportionalities. The reasons contributing to this overrepresentation of Black and Hispanic individuals are complex and well documented and, while not the focus of this Brief, do offer a contextual lens for these data. [6] [7] [8]

Table 5
Characteristics of violent crime suspects varied by type of crime

Characteristics	Population	Aggravated Assault	Homicide	Rape	Robbery
Black	5%	22% ▲	24% ▲	23% ▲	32% ▲
Hispanic	34%	42% ▲	40% ▲	38% ▲	42% ▲
White	46%	29% ▼	22% ▼	28% ▼	22% ▼
Other	15%	7% ▼	15% -	10% ▼	4% ▼
Under 18	24%	6% ▼	5% ▼	9% ▼	11% ▼
18 to 24	11%	17% ▲	20% ▲	21% ▲	22% ▲
25 to 39	19%	46% ▲	24% ▲	43% ▲	47% ▲
40 to 59	25%	26% -	29% ▲	21% ▼	17% ▼
60+	22%	5% ▼	23% -	5% ▼	2% ▼
Female	50%	17% ▼	11% ▼	2% ▼	15% ▼
Male	50%	83% ▲	89% ▲	98% ▲	85% ▲

▲: demographic overrepresented; ▼: demographic underrepresented; -: demographic represented -/+ 1%.
Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.
All homicide data are gathered from Law Enforcement Supplementals for 2021.

Sources: ARJIS; SANDAG 2021 Population and Housing Estimates; 2021 Homicide Supplemental report.

---

[6] Mauer, M. (2010). *Justice for All? Challenging Racial Disparities in the Criminal Justice System*. Published in *Human Rights, Volume 37, Number 4*. (Fall 2010). © 2010 by the American Bar Association
[7] Nellis, A. (2016). *The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons*. The Sentencing Project. Retrieved from sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-Color-of-Justice-Racial-and-Ethnic-Disparity-in-State-Prisons.pdf
[8] The Sentencing Project. (2018). *Report of The Sentencing Project to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance Regarding Racial Disparities in the United States Criminal Justice System*. Washington, D.C. Available online at sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/UN-Report-on-Racial-Disparities.pdf

Summary

To better understand the larger impact of crime, it is important to provide data on victims as part of any crime series or discussion to understand who is at the greatest risk for specific crimes. Furthermore, it is advisable to view the victim and suspect data in the larger societal context of historic racial disparities in the U.S. criminal justice system. While crime rates have fluctuated over the years, there has been little change in the characteristics of both victims and suspects. Below are key takeaways from these analyses.

- Age matters. Younger adults are more likely to be both a victim and suspect of violent crimes.
- Except for rape, males comprised most violent crime victims and nearly all suspects.
- Females were three times more likely to be killed by a family member, compared to males.
- Arguments were the most prevalent motives for homicides in 2021. Firearms were used in all gang homicides and in about half of argument-related ones.
- Black victims were overrepresented in all violent crime categories, as were Hispanic individuals, but to a lesser degree. This overrepresentation was also evident in the suspect data.
- Individuals ages 25 and 59 among those most likely to be a property crime victim or being the person to report a property crime.