



Homicides and Other Violent Crimes that Involve the Use of a Firearm in the San Diego Region

According to preliminary national figures, homicides across the country were up 15% during the first half of 2020 amidst the pandemic,¹ with other analyses showing increases as high as 37%.² Possible hypotheses for these increases have included growing gun sales during the pandemic, including “ghost guns”,³ less belief in police legitimacy, as well as decreased proactive policing which has been shown to be correlated with lower crime rates.⁴ With the recent release of the CJ Bulletin “41 Years of Crime in the San Diego Region”, this CJ Flash examines homicide and crimes involving the use of a firearm for the San Diego region in 2020.

Highlight 1

While one homicide is obviously one homicide too many, and the number of homicides jumped 35% over the past year (from 85 in 2019 to 115 in 2020) in the San Diego region, it is important to note that this number is much lower than the historical high reported in 1991 (278) (Figure 1). In addition, when the City of San Diego (which had 49% of the region’s 2020 homicides) is compared to other large U.S. cities with preliminary 2020 crime numbers, San Diego had the lowest homicide rate per 100,000 population of the six (Figure 2).⁵

Highlight 2

2020 crime data showed increases in the use of firearms in each of four crime types in which it is tracked. As Figure 3 shows, a firearm was the most common (57%) weapon type used in homicides in the San Diego region in 2020. In addition, a firearm was used in around one in every six robberies and aggravated assaults, and just over one in every ten domestic violence incidents. Comparing how the use of a firearm increased for these crime types from 2019 to 2020, there was a 42% jump in the number of aggravated assaults involving a firearm (compared to an 8% increase in aggravated assaults overall), a 38% increase for homicide (versus 35% overall), a 4% increase for robberies (versus a 13% decrease overall), and a 34% increase for domestic violence incidents (versus a 1% increase overall). Policy makers and community leaders across the region are aware of these increases in gun violence and are piloting collaborative programs such as the “No Shots Fired” Pilot Intervention and Prevention Program⁶ that seeks to stop gun violence, promote peace, and create safer neighborhoods for all of us. This new program supplements the San Diego City Attorney’s Gun Violence Restraining Order (GVRO) Program which launched in December 2017.⁷

Figure 1
Number of homicides, San Diego Region, 1980-2020

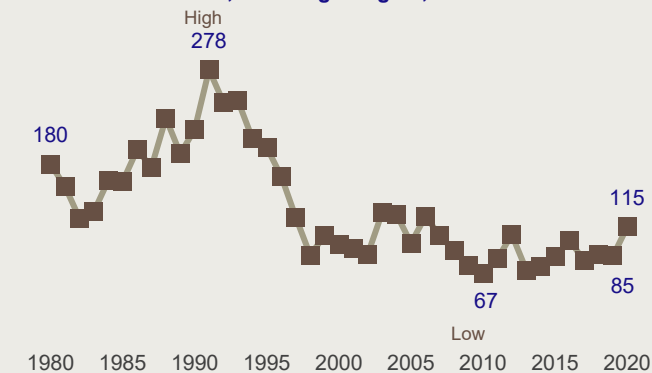


Figure 2
Preliminary homicide rates per 100,000 population for U.S. cities with populations one million and greater, 2020

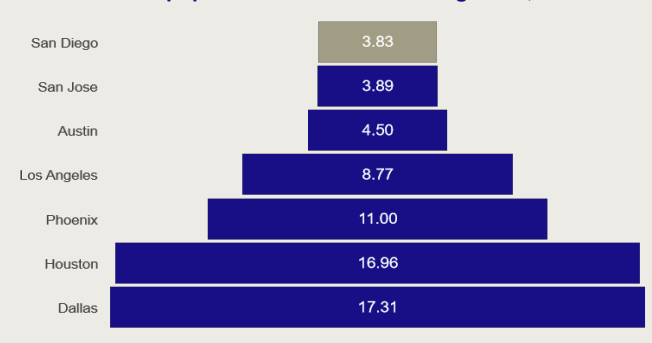
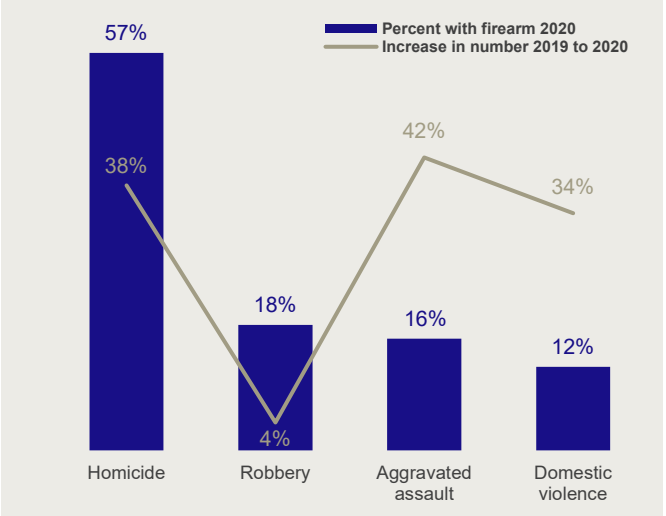


Figure 3
Percent of crimes that involved the use of a firearm in 2020 and percent increase in these crimes with a firearm from 2019 to 2020



¹ [fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/overview-of-preliminary-uniform-crime-report-january-june-2020](https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/overview-of-preliminary-uniform-crime-report-january-june-2020)

² Rosenfeld, R. & Lopez, E. (July 2020). *Pandemic, Social Unrest, and Crime in U.S. Cities*. Washington, D.C.: Council on Criminal Justice.

³ Ghost guns" are guns without serial numbers that are largely untraceable and do not require the typical background checks for purchase. Also called "kit guns" or "80% guns," they are often purchased in a kit that allows the buyer to assemble the gun at home.

⁴ [npr.org/2021/01/06/953254623/massive-1-year-rise-in-homicide-rates-collided-with-the-pandemic-in-2020](https://www.npr.org/2021/01/06/953254623/massive-1-year-rise-in-homicide-rates-collided-with-the-pandemic-in-2020)

⁵ Fourth quarter 2020 crime data available at: <https://crime-data-explorer.app.cloud.gov/explorer/national/united-states/prelim-quarter>.

⁶ [sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/cd4-fact-sheet-no-shots-fired.pdf](https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/cd4-fact-sheet-no-shots-fired.pdf)

⁷ A GVRO is a civil restraining order that removes firearms from individuals who pose a threat to themselves or others. Additional information about this program is available at: [sandiego.gov/cityattorney/divisions/civil litigation/gun-violence-protection](https://www.sandiego.gov/cityattorney/divisions/civil litigation/gun-violence-protection).



Highlight 3

With an increased focus both locally and nationally⁸ on firearm violence, additional analyses of 2020 homicide data looked at how homicides with a firearm (65 incidents) in the San Diego region varied from those that involved the use of some other weapon type (49 incidents). As Figures 4 through 9 show,

- Homicides that involved a firearm were more common than those that used another weapon in 6 of the 12 months, with a spike in November and December
- Individuals between the ages of 18 and 29 were more likely to be killed with a firearm
- Individuals killed with a firearm were more likely to be killed by someone they did not know than those killed with another weapon type
- Black/African-American and Hispanic/Latino victims were more likely to be killed by a firearm than another weapon type
- Homicides with a firearm were more likely to have occurred on the street or another outside location, compared to those with other weapon types
- Homicides with a motive related to gangs, robbery, and drugs were more likely to be identified in murders that involved a firearm

Figure 4
Monthly homicide numbers by weapon type, San Diego Region, 2020

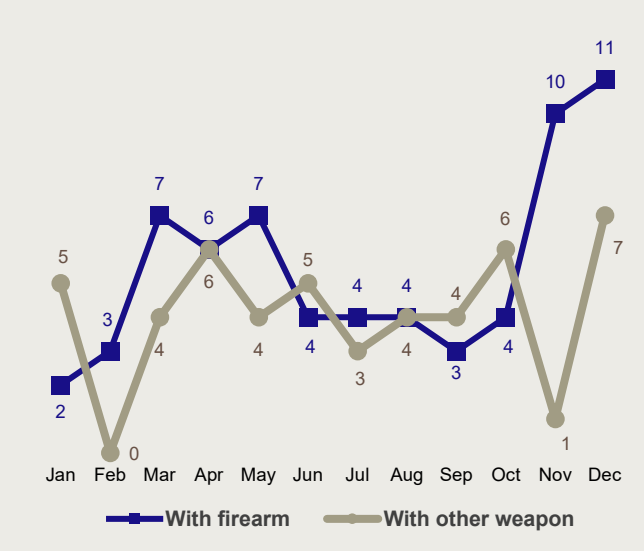


Figure 5
Homicide victim age by weapon type, San Diego Region, 2020

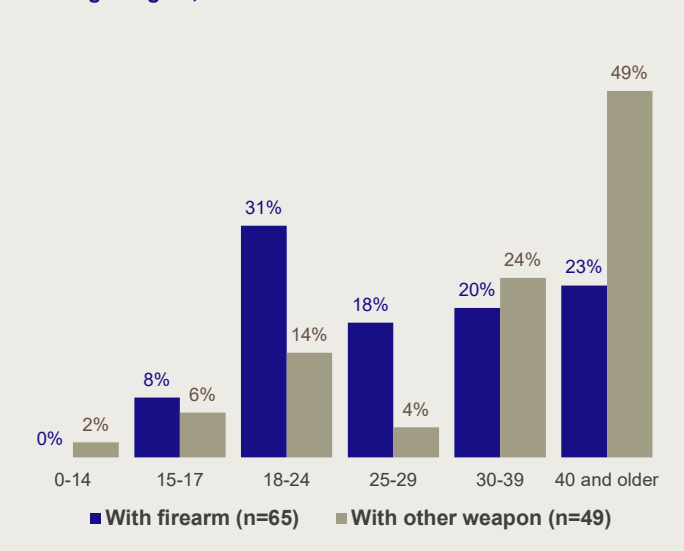


Figure 6
Stranger homicide victim-suspect relationship, San Diego Region, 2020

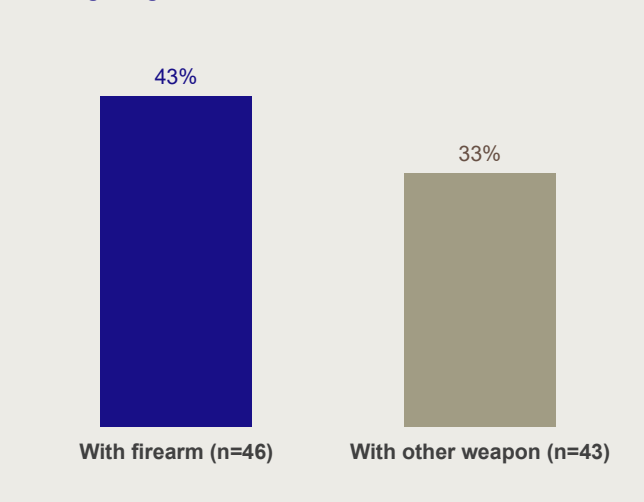
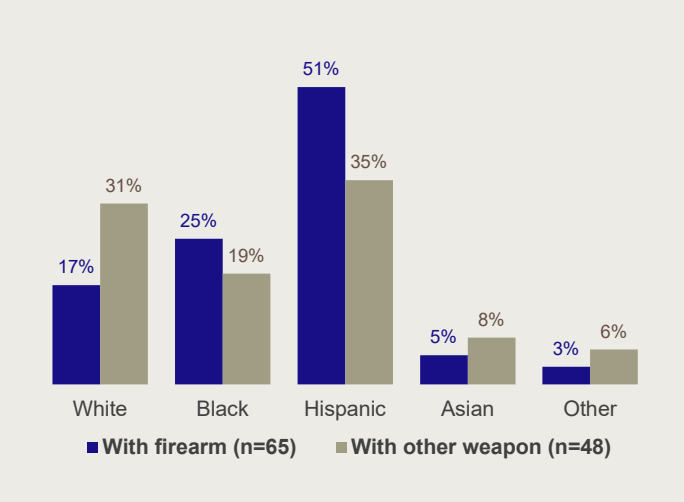


Figure 7
Homicide victim race by weapon type, San Diego Region, 2020



⁸ [whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/07/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-announces-initial-actions-to-address-the-gun-violence-public-health-epidemic/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/07/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-announces-initial-actions-to-address-the-gun-violence-public-health-epidemic/)



Figure 8
Homicide location by weapon type, San Diego Region, 2020

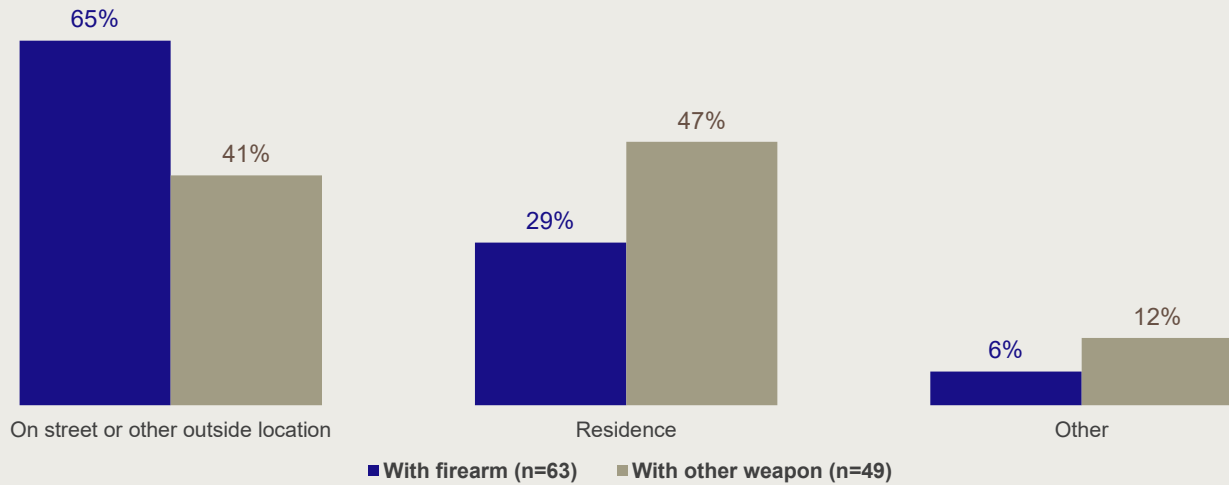
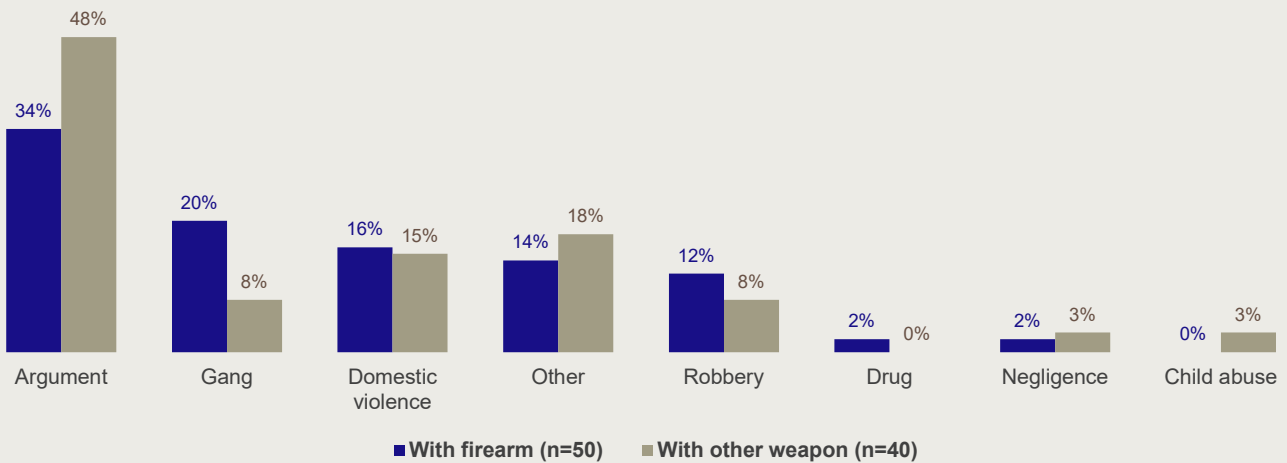


Figure 9
Homicide motive by weapon type, San Diego Region, 2020



As the pandemic and discussions regarding equity and reform continue both locally and nationally, SANDAG will continue to monitor local statistics related to violent crime, which is both a public safety and public health issue that requires collaboration, commitment, and the use of law enforcement and community-level evidence-based practices and strategies.