

Gun-related deaths in US reach record high, analysis finds

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A new report from the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence

Solutions analyzing Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data for 2021 reveals another record year for firearm fatalities.

The 48,830 lives lost to firearms in 2021, the first full year of the COVID-19 pandemic, is the highest number on record to date and 3,608 higher than 2020's total. Both firearm homicides and suicides reached record highs.

Among the findings:

- More than half of these deaths were due to suicide; there were 26,328 firearm suicides in 2021, up 2,036 over 2020. The firearm suicide rate increased 8.3% in 2021, the highest one-year increase in four decades.
- In 2021, Black people in the U.S. were nearly 14 times more likely to die by gun homicide than their white counterparts. Young Black males ages 15–34 were most at risk. They accounted for 36% of all [gun homicides](#) in 2021, but represent only 2% of the total U.S. population. In 2021, guns were responsible for 51% of all deaths of Black teens ages 15–19.
- In 2021, guns continued to be the leading cause of death for children and teens ages 1–19 as well as young adults under the age of 25. Young people ages 15–34 had a gun homicide rate twice the national average, accounting for three out of every five homicide deaths. This was driven by the high rate of firearm fatalities among Black people in these age groups.

The center, based at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, used CDC data that became publicly available this past January to analyze 2021 firearm fatalities across age, sex, race, and place. The report, "[U.S. Gun Violence in 2021: An Accounting of a Public Health Crisis](#)," written by Ari Davis, Rose Kim, and Cassandra Crifasi, with contributions from Lisa Geller, Silvia Villarreal, and Tim Carey, is

thought to be the most comprehensive analysis of the CDC's 2021 firearm data to date.

The report comes at a time of heightened concern about [gun violence](#) in the U.S. as mass shootings and other interpersonal gun violence, as well as firearm suicides, continue to occur across the country. The report also includes evidence-based policy recommendations aimed at curtailing firearm deaths.

The authors note that an estimated 9,500 fewer people would have been killed with guns in the U.S. in 2021 if the firearm homicide rate—the number of firearm homicides per 100,000—had remained where it was in 2014, when it reached a 40-year low.

"Our country is breaking records for all the wrong reasons—record gun sales combined with increasingly permissive gun laws are making gun violence a pervasive part of life in our country, leading to a sharp increase in gun deaths," says Ari Davis, [policy adviser](#) at the center and the report's lead author. "Perhaps most troubling is these spikes in homicides and suicides are almost entirely connected to guns."

For their report, the researchers analyzed 2021 firearm fatality data collected by the CDC's Wide-ranging Online Data for Epidemiologic Research (WONDER) database, considered to be the most reliable national source of gun death data available in the U.S. The data, based on death certificates, reflect the primary cause of death.

The report emphasizes that effective gun violence prevention laws can help reduce gun violence. In state-to-state comparisons, the authors found that the highest gun-related death rates tended to be in states with weaker gun laws and higher rates of gun ownership, while gun-related death rates were lower where gun violence prevention laws are stronger. For example, in 2021 a person living in Mississippi was 10 times more

likely to die by gun violence than someone living in Massachusetts.

The report recommends evidence-based policies to address gun violence including:

- Implementing permit-to-purchase laws, also known as gun purchaser licensing
- Using Domestic Violence Protection Orders and Extreme Risk Protection Orders—sometimes called "red flag" laws—to temporarily remove firearms from individuals determined to be at elevated risk for violence.
- Investing in community violence intervention programs
- Adopting child access prevention laws mandating safe [firearm](#) storage in households with children and/or teens
- Enacting stronger concealed carry permitting laws; and repealing "stand-your-ground" laws.

"Each life lost to gun violence represents a family torn apart, a community suffering," says Cassandra Crifasi, co-director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions and a report co-author. "The data are clear that states with stronger gun violence prevention laws have lower rates of gun [violence](#). Passage of evidence-based solutions would help end the needless suffering happening in all corners of our country."

Provided by Johns Hopkins University

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