

HOMICIDE IN CALIFORNIA, 2020

Vital statistics data are collected from death certificates for all violent deaths that occur in California. Enhanced surveillance through CalVDRS is completed for a subset of participating counties by linking vital statistics data to data abstracted from coroner and medical examiner reports, toxicology reports, and law enforcement reports. Circumstances that contributed to the death that were documented in these reports were included in the surveillance system. This additional data can address the **who, what, where, when, and how** of the deaths to help us try to understand **why** they occurred and prevent similar deaths from occurring in the future.

This document summarizes demographic data for homicide deaths of all California residents in 2020. Additionally, data regarding the circumstances surrounding the death are summarized for homicides that occurred in the subset of 34 participating CalVDRS counties using data from multiple sources. Legal intervention deaths, a subset of homicide in which the death results from law enforcement acting in the line of duty, are grouped with homicides in this report.

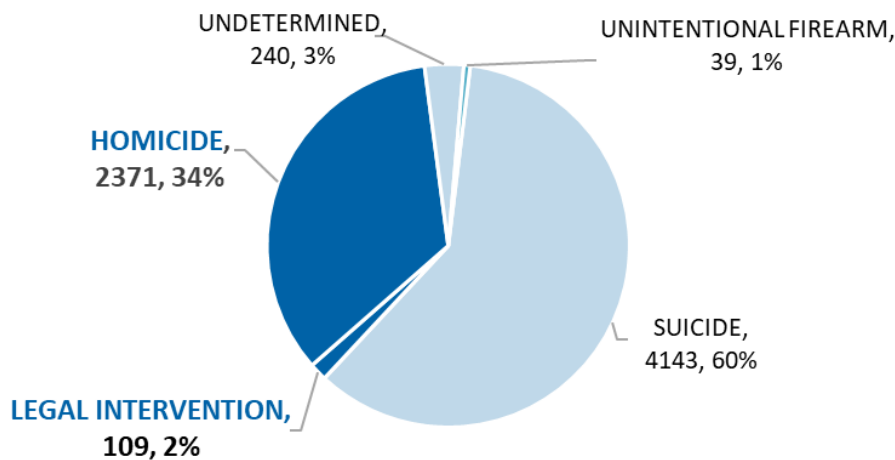
STATEWIDE HOMICIDE DATA (58 Counties)

- There were 6,902 violent deaths to Californians in 2020.
- Thirty-six percent of these were due to homicide (2,480), including the 2% legal intervention deaths (deaths that result from law enforcement acting in the line of duty).
- The homicide rate was 6.2 deaths per 100,000 population.

About CalVDRS

The [California Violent Death Reporting System \(CalVDRS\)](#) is housed in the [Injury and Violence Prevention Branch](#) in the California Department of Public Health. CalVDRS is funded by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) to conduct statewide surveillance on violent deaths that occur in California. Violent deaths include homicide (including legal intervention deaths that result from law enforcement acting in the line of duty), suicide, unintentional firearm deaths, and deaths of undetermined intent that meet the CalVDRS definition. CalVDRS collects data from multiple sources (i.e., death certificates, medical examiner/coroner reports, and law enforcement reports) in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the circumstances surrounding these deaths. The goal of this system is to promote development of data-driven public health prevention strategies that aim to reduce the number of violent deaths that occur each year.

Violent death among CA residents, 2020



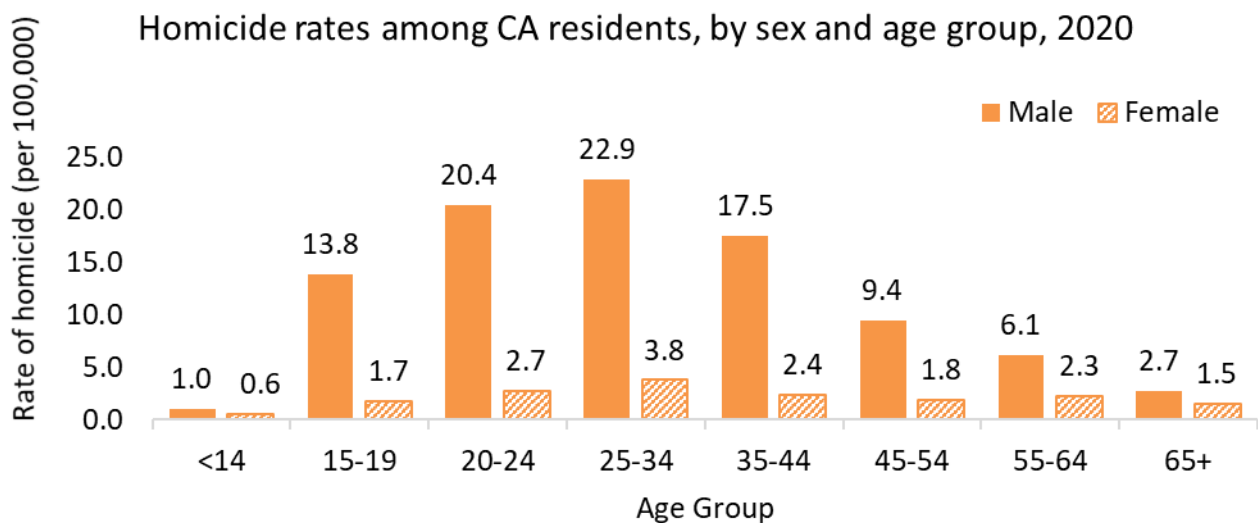
HOMICIDE DEMOGRAPHICS

Sex

- More than four out of every five homicide victims were male (84%).
- The rate of homicide among males (10.5 per 100,000) was more than 5 times the rate among females (2.0 per 100,000).

Age

- Rates of homicide among males were higher than females at all ages.
- Rates were highest in young adult males, aged 20-34 years.
- Among male victims, the rate of homicide decreased with age after the peak in young adulthood.
- Among female victims, the rate of homicide was also highest in young adults; however, there was no clear decrease with increasing age.



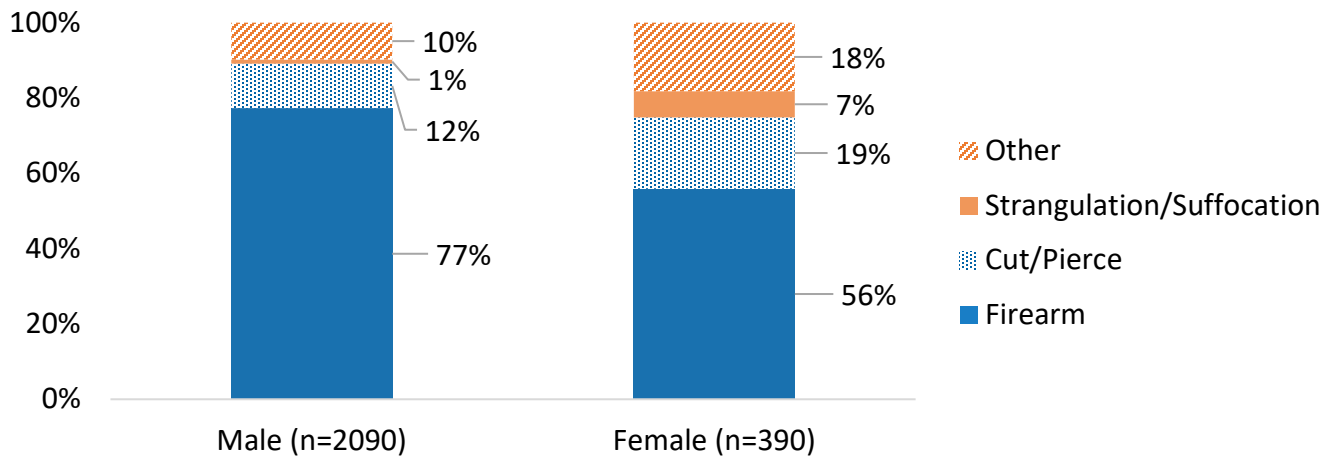
Race/Ethnicity

- Most homicide deaths were among Californians who are Hispanic (47%), followed by those who are Black (28%) and those who are White (19%).
- The rate of homicide among people who are Black (30.6 per 100,000) was five times the overall rate. People who are Native American also had a higher rate of homicide (14.4 per 100,000) than the overall rate.

Mechanism of Homicide

- Firearms were used in 74% of all homicide deaths, followed by sharp instruments in 13%.
- Among male victims of homicide, firearms were the weapon used in more than three out of every four deaths (77%).
- Among female victims of homicide, firearms were used in more than half of deaths (56%).

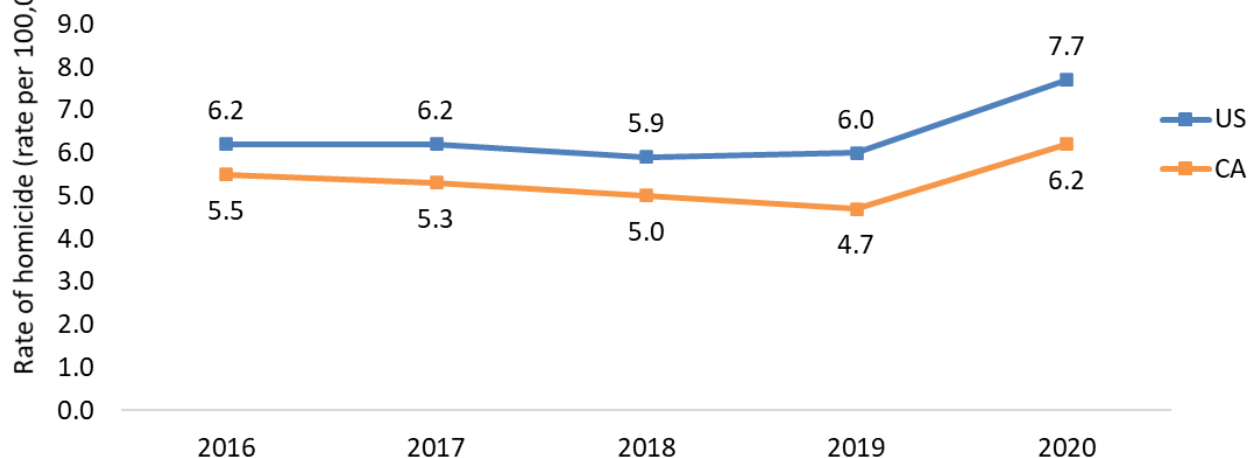
Mechanism of homicide among CA residents by sex, 2020



HOMICIDE TRENDS OVER TIME

- The homicide rate in 2020 represented a 32% increase over the 2019 rate.
- An increase in homicide rates in 2020 was seen nationwide; rates in California have remained lower than in many other states and in the country as a whole.
- In California, the increase was seen in nearly all demographic groups but was most severe among males, young adults, those who were Black, and in the use of firearms. These are all groups that already had the highest rates of homicide.

Homicide rates among United States and California residents, 2016-2020



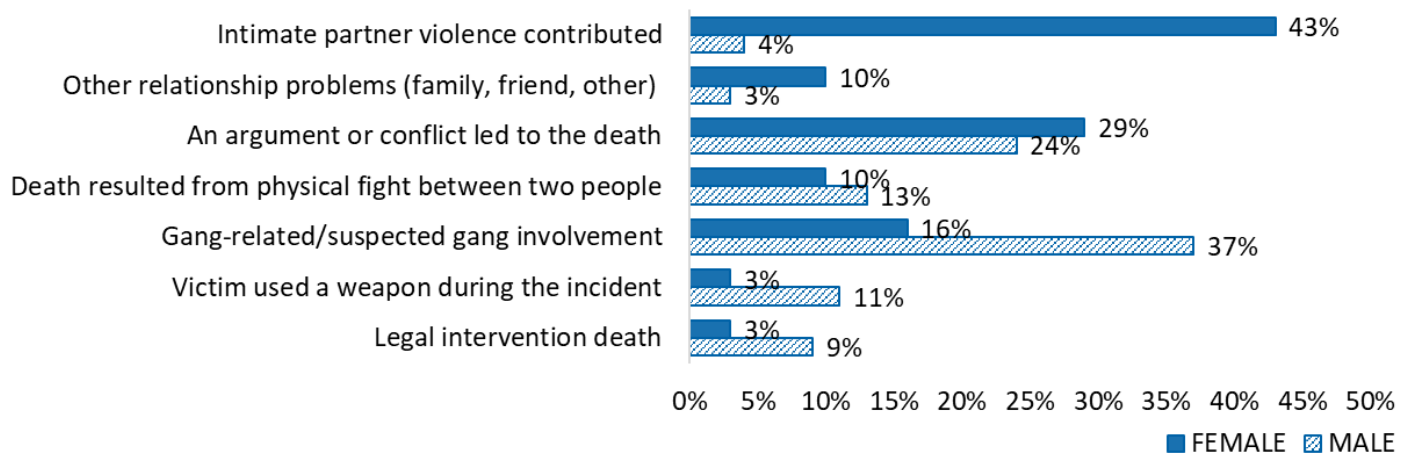
HOMICIDE CIRCUMSTANCES IN CalVDRS COUNTIES (34 Counties)

- There were 1345 homicides in CalVDRS counties with supplemental data from coroner/medical examiner or law enforcement reports (including legal intervention deaths). 74% had at least one circumstance documented (n=997).
- 9% of homicide victims were known to be experiencing homelessness and 8% of victims had an alcohol and/or other substance abuse problem.
- 15% of homicides were precipitated by another serious crime (e.g., assault, robbery, drug trade) and 4% of homicides had drug involvement (i.e., dealing of drugs or drug use was suspected to have played a role).

Homicide circumstances by sex

- The most frequent injury location for homicides among men was outdoors on a street or sidewalk (34%), followed by 27% in a house or apartment. Most homicides to females (59%) occurred in a house or apartment.
- Relationship problems, including both intimate partner relationships as well as others (e.g., with a family, friend, or acquaintance) were more likely to contribute to the homicide when the victim was female.
- The proportion of victims involved in an argument or conflict that contributed to their death (25% overall) or a physical fight (12% overall) was similar whether the victim was male or female.
- The homicide was more likely to have suspected gang member involvement, and the victim was more likely to use a weapon during the incident, when the homicide victim was male.
- 9% of homicides among males were legal intervention deaths, while 3% of female homicides were legal intervention deaths.

Percent of homicides with given circumstance by sex of victim
CalVDRS counties, 2020



HOMICIDE CIRCUMSTANCES AMONG WOMEN

- Homicides among women were more likely to be personal:
 - 43% had an IPV circumstance.
 - 47% occurred in the victim's own home (compared to 15% among male homicide victims). When IPV contributed to the homicide, 68% occurred in the female victim's own home.
 - 65% of the homicide suspects were someone known to the woman (compared to 20% among male homicide victims). When IPV contributed to the homicide, 67% of the homicide suspects were the woman's current spouse or intimate partner.
 - 19% were part of a homicide(s)/suicide incident where the homicide suspect then died by suicide. When IPV contributed to the homicide, 39% of female homicides ended in a homicide(s)/suicide event.

HOMICIDE CIRCUMSTANCES AMONG YOUNG CHILDREN

- Children 5 years of age and younger made up only 1% of deaths with known circumstances. While this is a very small sample (n=12), it can be revealing:
 - In most cases, the death was directly related to abuse or neglect by a caregiver.
 - In 75% of these deaths, the suspect was the victim's parent.
 - The weapons most likely to be used included firearms, blunt instruments, and personal weapons (e.g., hands, fists, and feet) used in actions such as punching or kicking.
 - One third of these were part of a homicide(s)/suicide incident where the homicide suspect then died by suicide.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PREVENTION

A focus on firearms can prevent homicide.

The fatal weapon for most victims of homicide was a firearm (71%). Strategies to facilitate a culture of firearm safety (e.g., safe and secure gun storage, training and licensing for owners, engagement with responsible gun dealers and owners in identifying solutions to violence) or those that may limit access to firearms in certain cases (e.g., youth, individuals at risk of harming themselves or others) may help to prevent these deaths in the future.

Address risk and resilience within communities:

Effective prevention efforts focus on those at increased risk. It may be beneficial to address risk factors that are relevant to the different types of homicides (e.g., intimate partner violence, gang-related violence, child abuse and neglect) so that prevention efforts are focused on supporting communities to create policy change and help those who are most at risk of violent death.

Homicide prevention efforts may also include trauma-informed strategies to address social, emotional, and mental health supports in communities.

Efforts should emphasize comprehensive strategies that can stop violence by addressing factors that contribute to underlying economic, physical, and social inequities that drive racial and ethnic disparities.

RESOURCES FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The following are technical packages from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and include evidence-based strategies that can prevent homicides in California:

[Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices](#)

[A Comprehensive Technical Package for the Prevention of Youth Violence and Associated Risk Behaviors](#)

[Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: A Technical Package for Policy, Norm, and Programmatic Activities](#)

[Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\): Leveraging the Best Available Evidence](#)

[Firearm Violence Prevention](#)

Notes about CalVDRS data

- 34 counties participated in CalVDRS data collection for 2020 deaths: Amador, Butte, Colusa, Contra Costa, Fresno, Glenn, Humboldt, Imperial, Kern, Kings, Lake, Lassen, Los Angeles, Marin, Mendocino, Merced, Modoc, Mono, Orange, Placer, Sacramento, San Benito, San Diego, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Shasta, Siskiyou, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Tehama, Trinity, Ventura, and Yolo Counties.
- Together, the CalVDRS counties represent 67% of the homicide deaths that occurred in 2020 in California and cover a mix of both urban and rural counties across the state.
- Data regarding the circumstances surrounding the death are reported as a percentage of deaths with at least one known circumstance; circumstances were known for 74% of abstracted homicide/legal intervention deaths in the 34 CalVDRS counties.
- Circumstances contributing to the homicide are not mutually exclusive, and more than one can be indicated for a single homicide death.

Data Sources

- *California Violent Death Reporting System (CalVDRS), Injury and Violence Prevention Branch, Center for Healthy Communities, California Department of Public Health (CDPH), 2020.*
- *US homicide rates: WISQARS: Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC).* Accessed October 31, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html>.
- *Vital Statistics data: California Comprehensive Master Death File (CCMDF), CDPH, 2020.*
 - Homicides are identified in the CCMDF as an underlying cause of death with ICD-10 codes X85-X99, Y00-Y09, Y87.1, or U01. Legal Intervention deaths are identified as an underlying cause of death with ICD-10 codes Y35.0-Y35.4, Y35.6-Y35.7, or Y89.0.
- *Population numbers used for the calculation of rates: California Department of Finance, Report P-3: State and County Population Projections by Race/Ethnicity, Detailed Age, and Gender, 2010-2060.*

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For more information on CalVDRS, or about this data, please contact

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