

# Firearm Usage in Violent Crimes

## Calendar Year: 2019-2023



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## Introduction

Firearms violence remains a pressing and complex issue with significant implications for public safety and community well-being. The proliferation of firearms, coupled with socio-economic disparities, cultural factors, and legislative frameworks, contributes to a multifaceted landscape of violence in Colorado, the United States, and worldwide. Understanding the dynamics of firearms-related incidents, their underlying causes, and their impact on individuals, communities, and societies is essential for developing effective prevention and mitigation strategies. By examining the current violent crime data in Colorado, published literature, and legislative policies, this report aims to foster an informed dialogue and evidence-based actions towards reducing firearms violence, developing long-term prevention measures, and promoting safer communities.

## Data & Methods

This report will provide publicly available data on firearms usage in violent crimes in Colorado from **January 2019 through December 2023** retrieved from the Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI) ([Colorado Crime Statistics](#)). Over the past five years, aggravated assault was the leading violent crime type, followed by sexual assault, robbery, and murder. While sexual assault is the second most frequent violent crime type, firearms were utilized in less than 1% of all cases in the past five years. *Throughout the report, the “violent crime” category will include murder, robbery, and aggravated assaults (mutually exclusive categories). Due to the low rate of firearm usage in sexual assault, it was not broken down for further analysis.* Please note that CBI data are dynamic and are subject to change as more information becomes available. Due to this, data provided in this report may not match other publications using the same data source. The Colorado population totals for *per capita* calculations (“rate per 100K”) can be found in the Appendix (see Table A).

Following the presentation of Colorado crime data, this report will display data on recovered firearms in Colorado provided by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) from **2018 through 2022** ([ATF Firearms Trace Data](#)). This report will conclude with a literature review from various peer-reviewed sources and information on the legal landscape in Colorado and the United States regarding gun policies. The data and information provided throughout this report are as current and accurate as possible, and any errors in the analysis are the responsibility of the report’s authors.

While this report is published by the Office of Research & Statistics (ORS) within the Colorado Department of Public Safety (CDPS), additional firearm-related data can be found on the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment (CDPHE) website: [Colorado Firearm Data Dashboard](#). The Colorado Firearm Data Dashboard is a tool developed by the Office of Gun Violence Prevention (OGVP) within CDPHE in collaboration with the Injury and Violence Prevention Center at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. The dashboard provides an interactive feature to explore firearm-related data in Colorado.

## Firearm Usage in Violent Crime

After three years of progressive increases, the 2023 data has shown a decrease in both violent crime (-6.9%) and firearm usage during violent crime (-12.7%). From 2019 to 2023, on average, firearms were used in 39% of violent crimes. Although firearm usage was down in 2023 from 2022, the percentage of violent crimes involving a firearm in 2023 (40.7%) was still above the five-year average (see Table 1).

Table 1. All violent crimes compared to violent crimes where a firearm was used, 2019-2023.

Year	Violent Crime Total	Annual % Change*	Firearm Use Total	Annual % Change*	Firearm Use %**
2019	18,200	-	6,135	-	33.7%
2020	21,326	17.2%	7,924	29.2%	37.2%
2021	23,925	12.2%	9,355	18.1%	39.1%
2022	25,832	8.0%	11,213	19.9%	43.4%
2023	24,040	-6.9%	9,789	-12.7%	40.7%
<b>Average</b>	<b>22,665</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>8,883</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>38.8%</b>

Source: Colorado Bureau of Investigation, *Crime Statistics*, retrieved February 28, 2024.

\* Annual Percent (%) Change refers to an annual change relative to the previous year. The Annual % Change column refers to the preceding (left) column.

\*\* Percentage of firearms used relative to all violent crimes. This percentage is derived by dividing Firearm Use (N) by Violent Crime (N).

Over the past five years, males were 6.7 times more likely than females to perpetrate a violent crime with a firearm and were 1.8 times more likely to be the victims of such crimes. From 2019 to 2023, there was a 62% increase in crimes perpetrated by those 17 and under (104.3 to 169.2) compared to a 34% increase among those 18 and over (523.0 to 702.4). There was a 63% increase in victims who were 17 and under (156.9 to 255.7) compared to a 47% increase among those 18 and over (552.6 to 814.2). Please see Table 2 for more details.

Table 2. Firearm use *rate* per 100K population by age and gender for offenders and victims in all violent crimes, 2019-2023.

Year	Offender (Male)	Offender (Female)	Offender (Age 10-17)	Offender (Age 18+)	Victim (Male)	Victim (Female)	Victim (Age 10-17)	Victim (Age 18+)
2019	202.4	29.6	104.3	523.0	131.9	72.9	156.9	552.6
2020	258.2	38.3	115.8	672.2	165.8	88.2	179.8	708.4
2021	303.1	43.5	137.4	745.8	194.8	105.9	208.9	799.2
2022	340.9	54.0	160.3	831.8	218.0	129.4	292.6	888.8
2023	290.0	42.7	169.2	702.4	198.3	106.9	255.7	814.2
<b>Average</b>	<b>278.9</b>	<b>41.6</b>	<b>137.4</b>	<b>695.1</b>	<b>181.8</b>	<b>100.7</b>	<b>218.8</b>	<b>752.6</b>

Source: Colorado Bureau of Investigation, *Crime Statistics*, retrieved February 28, 2024.

## Firearm Usage in Violent Crimes: 2019-2023

Firearms were used most frequently during the commission of a murder (72.1%) (Table 3 & Figure 1). The 2022 peak in firearm usage was held for murder (78.0%), robbery (41.7%), and aggravated assault (43.1%). In 2023, the percentage of firearm use in violent crimes decreased slightly, but it is still the second-highest year in terms of firearm use in violent crimes over the past five years. Please see Table 3 for more details.

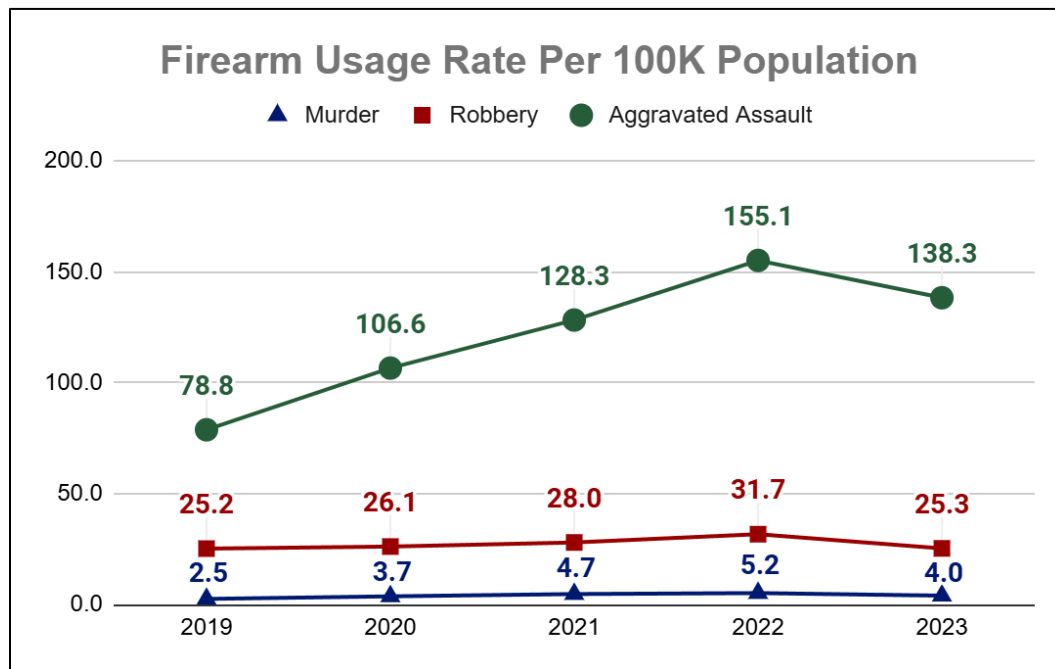
Table 3. Percentage of firearms use in each violent crime type, 2019-2023.

Crime Type	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	5-Yr Average
<b>Violent Crime</b>	24.5%	28.7%	30.2%	34.8%	33.1%	<b>30.2%</b>
<b>Murder</b>	63.2%	68.7%	74.7%	78.0%	75.7%	<b>72.1%</b>
<b>Robbery</b>	38.6%	37.8%	37.3%	41.7%	39.3%	<b>38.9%</b>
<b>Aggravated Assault</b>	31.9%	36.4%	38.8%	43.1%	40.4%	<b>38.2%</b>

Source: Colorado Bureau of Investigation, *Crime Statistics*, retrieved February 28, 2024.

Aggravated assault remains the leading violent crime using a firearm with its highest rate in 2022 at 155.1 per 100,000 population. There are more aggravated assaults per capita, firearms were used in about 40% of crimes. This compares to murder which has a lower rate, reaching a maximum rate of 5.2 in 2022, but where firearms were used an average of 72% of the time (Table 2 & Figure 1).

Figure 1. Firearms use *rate* per 100K population by each violent crime type, 2019-2023.



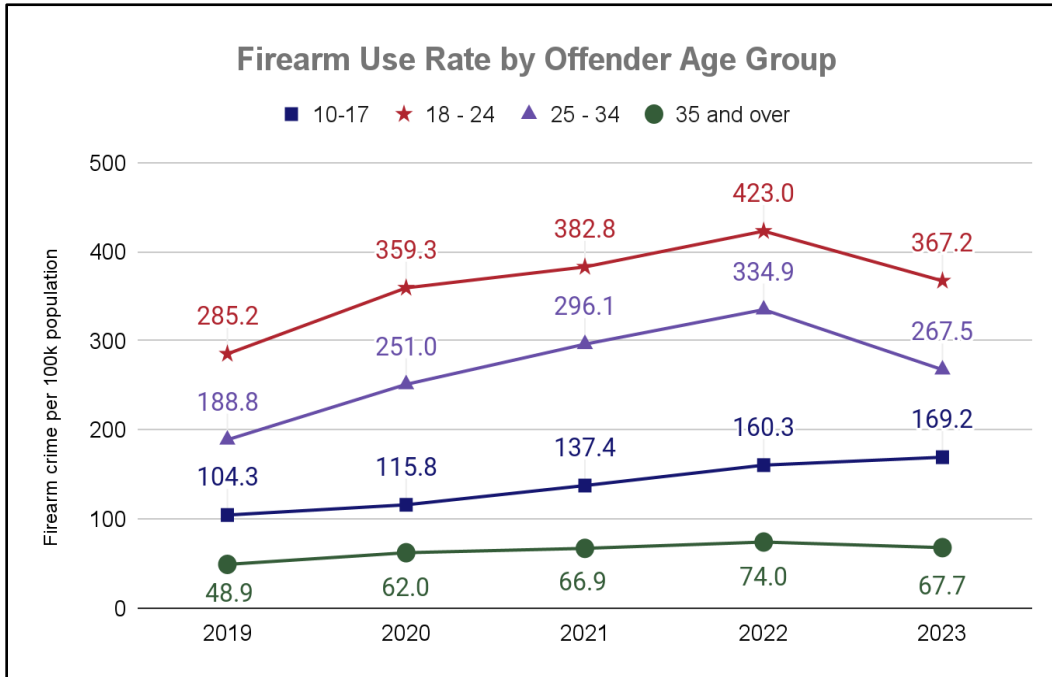
Source: Colorado Bureau of Investigation, *Crime Statistics*, retrieved February 28, 2024.

## Offender Demographics

### Offender Age Group

Offenders aged 18 to 24 consistently have the highest firearm usage rate in violent crime. In 2023, individuals aged 18 to 24 (367.2) were 1.4 times more likely to use a firearm than 25-34-year-olds (267.5), 2.2 times more likely than 10-17-year-olds (169.2), and 5.4 times more likely than those aged 35 or older (67.7) (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Firearm use *rate* per 100K population in all violent crimes, organized by offender age groups, 2019-2023.



Source: Colorado Bureau of Investigation, *Crime Statistics*, retrieved February 28, 2024.

Table 4. Firearms use *N* in all violent crimes by offender age group, 2019-2023.

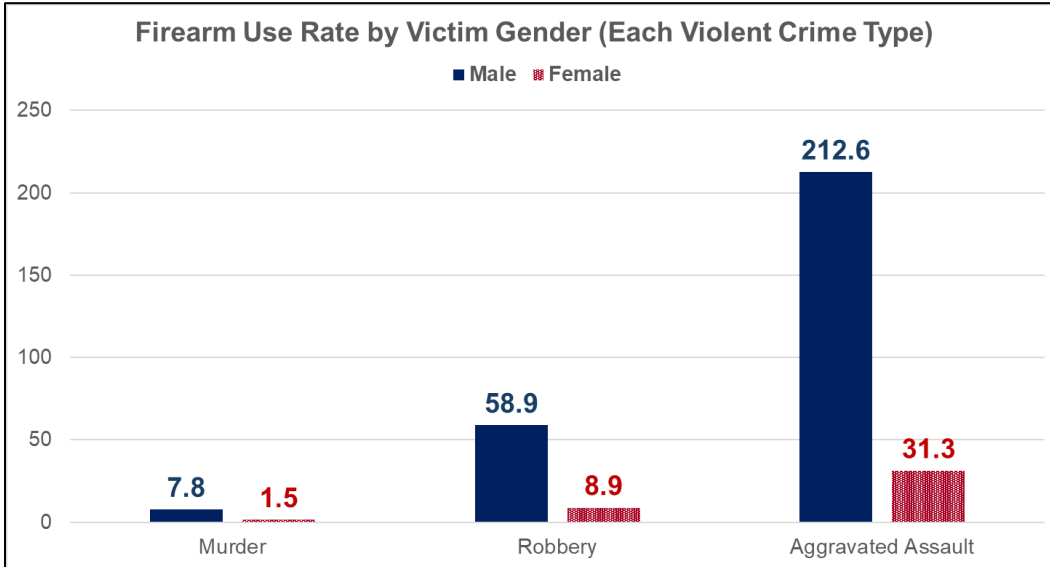
Year	Age 10-17	18-24	25-34	35 or older
2019	626	1,531	1,684	1,482
2020	695	1,937	2,249	1,909
2021	821	2,054	2,658	2,084
2022	950	2,281	3,009	2,331
2023	998	2,005	2,403	2,167
<b>Average</b>	<b>818</b>	<b>1,962</b>	<b>2,401</b>	<b>1,995</b>

Source: Colorado Bureau of Investigation, *Crime Statistics*, retrieved February 28, 2024.

## Offender Gender

On average, males were offenders of violent crimes 6.7 times more than females (Table 2). The firearm usage rate across all violent crimes steadily increased for both genders from 2019 through 2022. In 2023, the drop in violent crime overall also resulted in a decrease in the firearm usage rate for both genders.

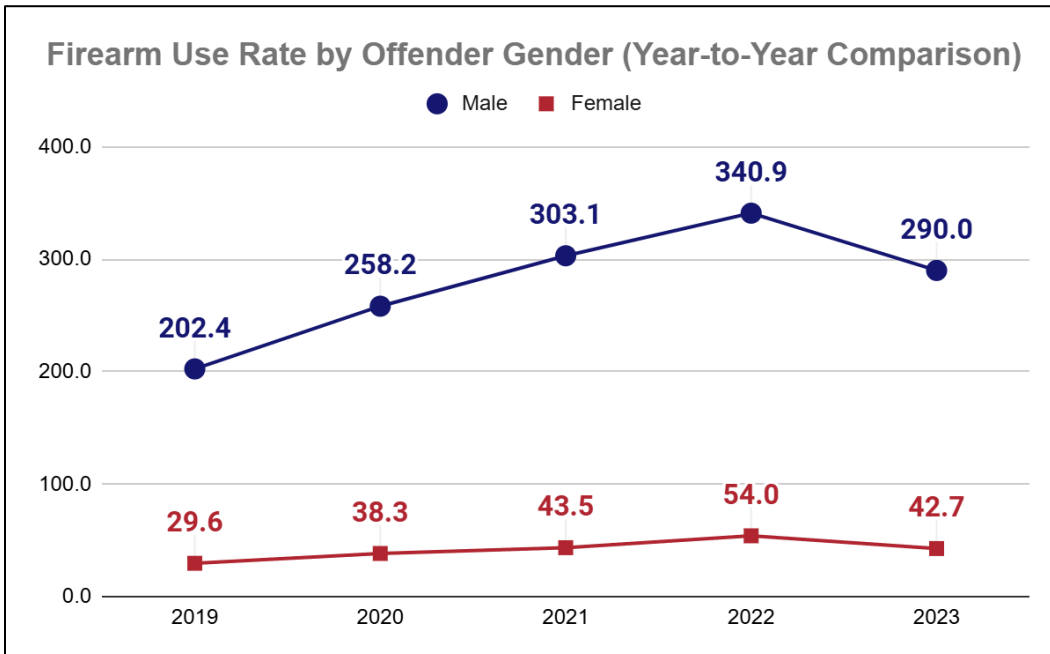
Figure 3. Firearm use *rate* by violent crime type and offender gender, 2019-2023 (combined).



Source: Colorado Bureau of Investigation, *Crime Statistics*, retrieved February 28, 2024.

**NOTE:** CBI currently does not have a non-binary gender classification.

Figure 4. Firearm use *rate* in violent crime by offender gender, 2019-2023.



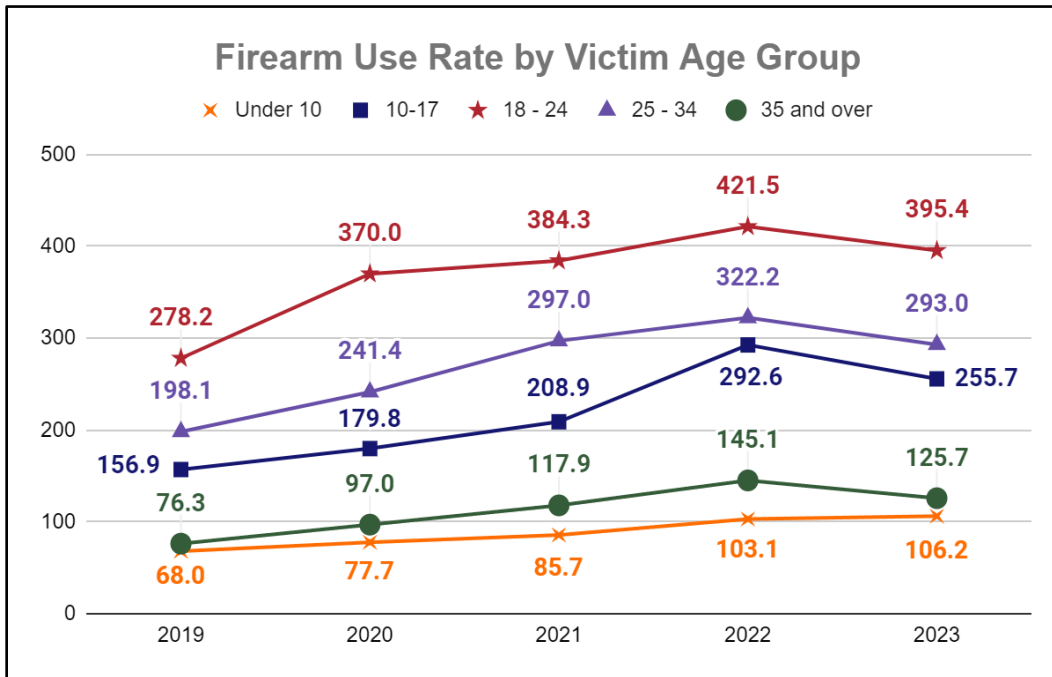
Source: Colorado Bureau of Investigation, *Crime Statistics*, obtained on February 28, 2024.

## Victim Demographics

### Victim Age Group

On average, the firearm victimization rate for those 18 to 24 years old (369.9) was 1.4 times higher than those 25-34 (270.4), 1.7 times higher than those 10-17 (218.8), 3.3 times higher than those 35 or older (112.4), and 4.2 times higher than those under 10 years old (88.1).

Figure 5. Firearm use *rate* per 100K population in all violent crimes, organized by victim age groups, 2019-2023.



Source: Colorado Bureau of Investigation, *Crime Statistics*, retrieved April 29, 2024.

Table 5. Firearms use *N* in all violent crimes, organized by victim age groups, 2019-2023.

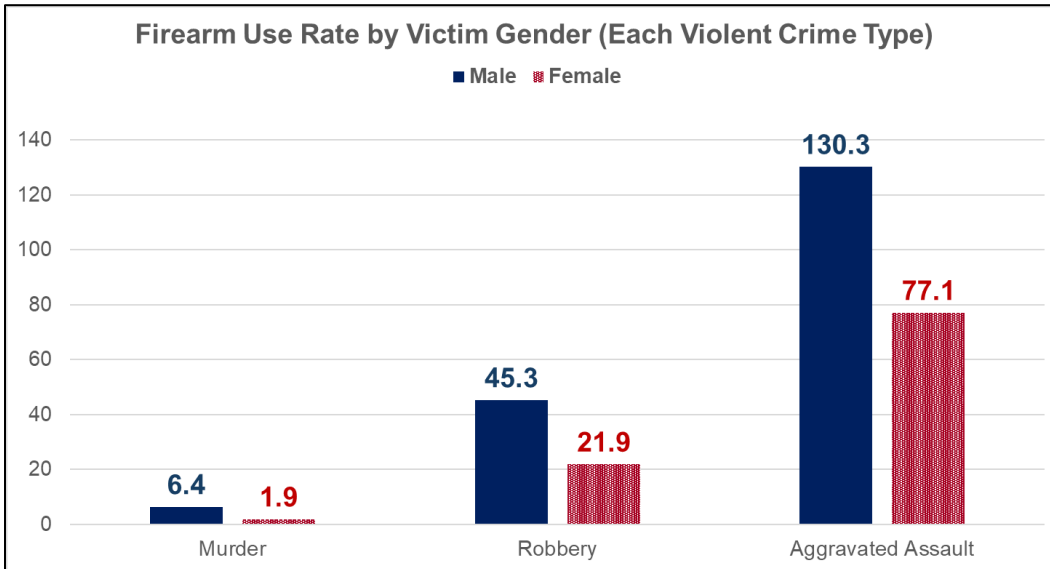
Year	Under Age 10	10-17	18-24	25-34	35 or older
2019	459	942	1,493	1,767	2,312
2020	521	1,079	1,995	2,163	2,985
2021	568	1,248	2,062	2,666	3,675
2022	678	1,734	2,273	2,895	4,571
2023	696	1,508	2,159	2,632	4,025
<b>Average</b>	<b>584</b>	<b>1,302</b>	<b>1,996</b>	<b>2,425</b>	<b>3,514</b>

Source: Colorado Bureau of Investigation, *Crime Statistics*, retrieved February 28, 2024.

## Victim Gender

While females are victimized more in sex offenses (and subsequently violent crimes as a whole), firearms are utilized in less than 1% of those crimes. With sex offenses removed from the equation, on average, males were victims of violent crimes 1.8 times more than females where a firearm was used (Table 2).

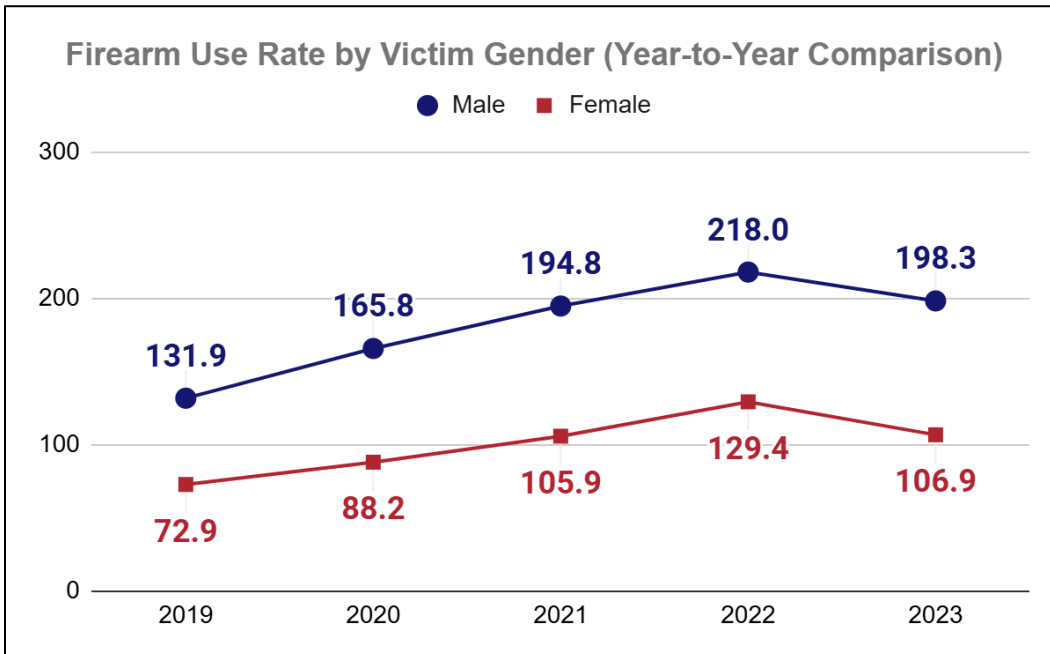
Figure 6. Firearms victimization rate by crime type and victim gender, 2019-2023 (combined).



Source: Colorado Bureau of Investigation, *Crime Statistics*, retrieved February 28, 2024.

**NOTE:** CBI currently does not have a non-binary gender classification.

Figure 7. Firearm victimization rate by victim gender, 2019-2023.



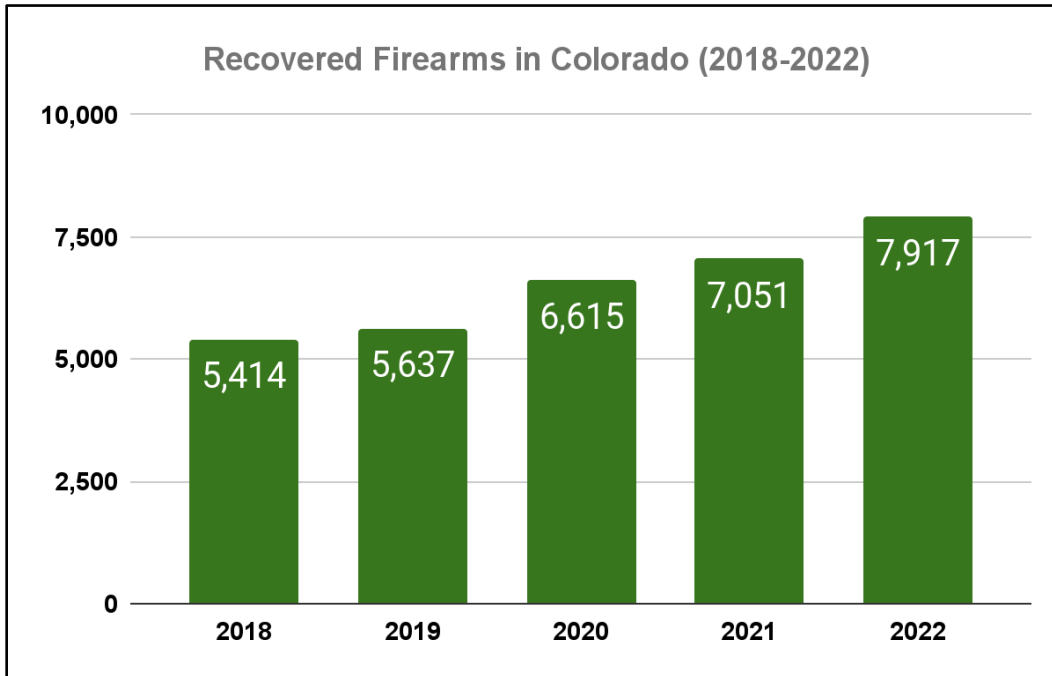
Source: Colorado Bureau of Investigation, *Crime Statistics*, retrieved February 28, 2024.



## Recovered Firearms in Colorado (2018-2022)

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) provides information on recovered firearms from a crime or other firearm-related event in the United States on an annual basis. A key component of ATF's enforcement mission is tracing firearms on behalf of thousands of local, state, federal, and international law enforcement agencies. Data is provided through the [ATF Firearms Trace Data](#). This section of the report will focus on recovered firearms in Colorado from **January 2018 through December 2022**. The data is made available during the fourth quarter of each year for the previous calendar year.

Figure 8. Annual total of recovered firearms in Colorado, 2018-2022.



Source: ATF, *Firearms Trace Data*, retrieved November 7, 2023.

Over the years 2018-2022, **32,634 firearms** were recovered in Colorado in relation to a crime or other firearm-related event (Table 6), which accounted for approximately 2% of all firearms recovered in the United States. Of those, 68% were pistols, 14% were rifles, 10% were revolvers, and 7% were shotguns. All other types of firearms were 1% or under (Table 6). There has been a 46% increase in firearm recovery from 2018 to 2022.

Table 6. Type of firearms recovered in Colorado, 2018-2022.

Firearm Type	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Firearm Type 5-Yr Total	Firearm Type 5-Yr Total (%)	Firearm Type 5-Yr Average
Pistols	3,412	3,642	4,390	4,923	5,680	22,047	68.0%	4,998
Rifles	834	805	1,002	885	955	4,481	14.0%	947
Revolvers	631	636	682	654	663	3,266	10.0%	666
Shotguns	449	452	461	518	499	2,379	7.0%	493
Derringers	30	26	40	35	41	172	1.0%	39
Machine Guns	25	33	Other	Other	44	102	0.3%	15
Receivers/Frames	Other	Other	15	16	Other	31	0.1%	10
Other	33	43	25	20	35	156	0.5%	27
<b>Annual Total</b>	<b>5,414</b>	<b>5,637</b>	<b>6,615</b>	<b>7,051</b>	<b>7,917</b>	<b>32,634</b>	<b>100%</b>	

Source: ATF, *Firearms Trace Data*, retrieved November 7, 2023.

**NOTE:** “Other” - the ATF reported firearm types that were not common and those that were unknown in the “Other” category.

Crime categories are reported in the ATF Firearms Trace Data, and the majority of crimes with recovered firearms in Colorado were weapon-related offenses (56%) which include four weapon offenses: firearm under investigation, found firearm, possession of a weapon, and weapon offense. Dangerous drugs accounted for 7% of the recovered firearms, while aggravated assault, homicide, property crimes, suicide, and traffic offenses accounted for 4% of each of the recovered firearms over the past five years (Table 7).

Table 7. Crime category (cat.) associated with a recovered firearm in Colorado, 2018-2022.

Crime Cat. (alphabetical)	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Crime Cat. 5-Yr Total	Crime Cat. 5-Yr Total (%)	Crime Cat. 5-Yr Average
Aggravated Assault	169	182	215	324	290	1,180	4%	236
Dangerous Drugs	517	402	354	424	432	2,129	7%	426
Homicide	187	234	243	266	348	1,278	4%	256
Other	1,017	1,026	1,304	1,123	1,171	5,641	17%	1,128
Property Crimes	202	195	251	281	363	1,292	4%	258
Suicide	261	248	245	318	317	1,389	4%	278
Traffic Offense	224	216	248	311	428	1,427	4%	285
Weapon-Related*	2,837	3,134	3,755	4,004	4,568	18,298	56%	3,660
<b>Annual Total</b>	<b>5,414</b>	<b>5,637</b>	<b>6,615</b>	<b>7,051</b>	<b>7,917</b>	<b>32,634</b>	<b>100%</b>	

Source: ATF, *Firearms Trace Data*, retrieved November 7, 2023.

\* Includes four weapon offenses: firearm under investigation, found firearm, possession of a weapon, and weapon offense.

## Firearm Use by Prisoners

According to a 2016 Survey of Prison Inmates (SPI), 21% of all state and federal inmates who were serving time for a crime reported that they possessed or carried a firearm during the commission of their crime(s) (Alper & Glaze, 2019). Of the 287,400 prisoners reporting possessing a firearm during the offense 56% reported the firearms were stolen, found at the crime scene, or obtained off the streets or from an underground marketplace; 25% reported that they obtained the firearm from a friend, family, or as a gift; and 7% reported they purchased the firearm themselves from a licensed dealership (Alper & Glaze, 2019).

The survey reported an estimate of 667,300 state prisoners and 20,900 federal prisoners who were serving time specifically for a violent offense (Alper & Glaze, 2019). Of those, 29% of state prisoners possessed a firearm and 23% used a firearm during the commission of the crime (Alper & Glaze, 2019). For federal prisoners, 36% possessed a firearm and 28% used one (Alper & Glaze, 2019). For a breakdown of each crime type and likelihood of firearm use by state and federal prisoners, please see Table 8.

Table 8. Estimated number (N) of state and federal prisoners who possessed (poss.) a gun during the offense and the percentage of those who used the gun, 2016.

Crime Type	State (S.) Prisoners Total	S. Prisoners Gun Poss. (%)	S. Prisoners Gun Use (%)	Federal (F.) Prisoners Total	F. Prisoners Gun Poss. (%)	F. Prisoners Gun Use (%)
Total	1,211,200	20.9%	13.9%	170,400	20.0%	5.0%
Violent	667,300	43.6%	37.2%	20,900	36.2%	25.3%
Property	186,100	4.9%	2.0%	12,000	2.6%	N/A
Drug	180,800	8.4%	0.8%	80,500	12.3%	0.6%
Public Order	158,300	21.5%	5.6%	52,900	30.2%	5.3%

Source: 2016 Survey of Prison Inmates (SPI), *Table 1*, retrieved April 19, 2024.

## Literature Review

### General Gun Policy Review

Historically it has proven difficult to enact gun reform policies at the federal level. However, many states, including Colorado, have enacted their own state-level policies to address gun violence which have led to varying results throughout the US (Kantack & Paschall, 2019). In 2021, the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), one of the centers within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), reported the Colorado firearm death rate as 17.8 for every 100,000 residents, the 17th highest in the nation (NCHS, 2021). Mississippi’s firearm death rate was ranked the highest at 33.9, and Massachusetts’ firearm death rate was ranked the lowest at 3.4 for every 100,000 residents (NCHS, 2021). The national average firearm death rate was 14.6 for every 100,000 residents (NCHS, 2021).

Three types of laws in particular have been the topic of discourse regarding gun policies in recent years: Child Access Prevention (CAP), Right-to-Carry (RTC), and Stand-Your-Ground (SYG). CAP laws allow charges to be brought against “adults who intentionally or carelessly allow children to have unsupervised access to firearms. CAP laws aim to reduce unintentional firearm injuries and deaths, suicides, and violent crime

among youth chiefly by reducing children's access to stored guns” (Source: [RAND Research](#), 2023). RTC laws allow people to carry concealed weapons, sometimes without a permit, background check, or safety training (Source: [RAND Research](#), 2023). SYG laws do not require people to retreat before using force, including deadly force with a firearm. “SYG laws are intended to reduce barriers for self-defense to further deter criminal victimization. Given the availability of self-defense laws for situations in which safe retreat is not possible, SYG laws primarily apply when an individual could safely retreat from an attack or when the availability of safe retreat is ambiguous” (Source: [RAND Research](#), 2023).

According to Schell, et al. (2020), CAP laws contributed to a decrease in firearm-related deaths. In contrast, RTC and SYG laws contributed to an increase in firearm-related deaths (Schell, et al., 2020). The study concluded that “the joint effects of these laws indicate that the restrictive gun policy regime (having a CAP law without an RTC or SYG law) has a 0.98 probability of being associated with a reduction in firearm-related deaths relative to the permissive policy regime. This estimated effect corresponds to an 11% reduction in firearm-related deaths relative to the permissive legal regime.” (Schell, et al., 2020).

Smart, et al. (2023) came to the same conclusion that CAP laws reduced self-inflicted fatal and non-fatal firearms injuries among youth and “evidence also supports ... that such laws reduce firearm homicides among youth.” SYG laws were “associated with increases in firearm homicides and moderate evidence that such laws increase the total number of homicides.” Moderate evidence concluded that background check requirements reduced homicides, waiting periods reduced firearm suicides and total homicides, and restrictive minimum age requirement for purchase reduced firearm suicide (Smart et al., 2023).

### **Public Perception of Gun Violence in the United States**

Firearm victimization accounts for approximately 35,000 deaths per year in the United States (US) in addition to approximately 120,000 injuries that do not result in death (Goldstick et al., 2019; Kaufman et al., 2021). Gun violence is both a public safety and public health concern; in addition to violent crimes, suicide was the most common cause of firearm injury death in the US. (Drexler, 2016). Berryessa et al. (2019) state that “media coverage of gun violence has heterogeneous effects on public support for firearm regulation and may influence support for policies aimed at reducing specific types of gun violence.” Due to media coverage (or lack thereof) of certain crimes and the individuals involved, public support for certain gun policies may not align with empirical research (Appiah, 2006; Berryessa et al., 2019; White et al., 2020). For example, a randomized experiment of 3,410 US-based participants found that respondents “were less supportive of policies to address gun suicide or accidents and more supportive of policy solutions to mass shootings,” despite mass shootings being rare compared to suicides (Berryessa et al., 2019). In addition, the experiment found that a victim’s race, particularly Black/African American, was a strong indicator of less public support for gun policies that regulate firearm ownership, sales, and carrying (Berryessa et al., 2019). Public opinion on gun-related policies is influenced by media coverage, including who to consider the stereotypical victims and stereotypical perpetrators, which are then further exacerbated by individual political beliefs, cultural differences, and internal biases (Appiah, 2006; White et al., 2020).

While media coverage may sway public opinion and perpetuate racial stereotypes, “even the largest mass shooting in American history was insufficient to mobilize public opinion on gun control in a way that would affect federal policy” (Kantack & Paschall, 2019). The Las Vegas Shooting in 2017 garnered heavy media coverage and prompted serious discussions into gun reform policies at every level of government, yet “proponents of gun control were once again unable to use the aftermath of a mass shooting to enact changes aimed at preventing gun violence” (Kantack & Paschall, 2019). The US has the highest gun death

rate (13.6 per 100,000 residents) and firearm circulation rate (121 firearms in circulation for every 100 residents) of any developed country due to its unique culture, norms, and legal structures (CDC, 2023; Leach-Kemon et al., 2023; Raissian et al., 2023; Small Arms Survey, 2020). According to Raissian et al. (2023), “most Americans want to prevent gun violence but see no available pathway to doing so” due to the polarized and politicized environment that arises when the topic of gun reforms is brought up. The CDC (2023) reports gun suicide and homicide among the top five causes of death for individuals between the ages of 1 to 54 (Raissian et al., 2023).

### Gun Violence as a Public Health Issue

Gun violence in the U.S., which also includes suicide and unintentional injuries, increased substantially during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a 30% increase in violent crimes nationally from 2019 to 2020, and 7% from 2020 to 2021, prompting President Joseph Biden to declare it a “public health crisis” in 2021 (Elison, 2022; Kim, 2022). In 2020, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) found that approximately 77% of homicides nationwide involved the use of a firearm with various causes such as “pandemic-associated unemployment, recession-induced loss of public revenue, and de-policing in the wake of social justice protests” (Braga, 2022; Kim, 2022). A study of health insurance claims conducted between 2007 and 2021 found that survivors of gun violence had a 68% increase in psychiatric conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression; those with serious injuries had a higher percentage of these conditions (Youmshajekian, 2023). Parents of survivors also saw a 30% increase in psychiatric conditions, and the conditions can last for years, sometimes decades after the violent incident occurred (Youmshajekian, 2023). Survivors also showed a higher prevalence of substance use disorders and pain disorders, especially young survivors of gun violence (Youmshajekian, 2023). In 2024, US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy declared gun violence as a public health crisis in a [40-page publication](#) that outlines the scope of firearm violence, its impact, and policy suggestions (Trisman, 2024).

In 2019, “the CDC received a congressional appropriation to conduct research to better understand the underlying causes of firearm violence and effective ways to keep individuals, families, schools, and communities safe from firearm-related injuries, deaths, and crime” (Brownlee, 2022; Braga, 2022). By framing gun violence as a public health issue, it expands the stakeholders and resources beyond law enforcement, allowing for more innovative, multidisciplinary strategies and preventative measures (Braga, 2022; Goodwin & Grayson, 2020). “Treating gun violence as a public health issue rather than solely a criminal justice issue means using the methods and strategies associated with disease control—a focus on prevention rather than simply being reactive, using scientific methodology to identify risks and patterns, and collaborating across multiple disciplines to address the issue” (Carswell, 2019). Gun violence and its preventative solutions are a multifaceted, widespread public health response that requires more than a single solution from one source. Collaboration from all U.S. branches of government, law enforcement, the public health sector, academia, and the general public are needed to forge an evidence-based path forward to reduce and prevent gun violence long-term (Carswell, 2019; Ulrich, 2023).

### Racial Disparities with Gun Violence

Poverty, unemployment, traumatic childhood experiences, and substance abuse are important factors identified by criminologists that are related to violent behavior – factors that disproportionately affect minority and underserved communities that lead to disproportionate firearm-related deaths and injuries in those communities (Carswell, 2019; Rich & Grey, 2005). Individuals who live and grow up in underserved communities often suffer from PTSD due to regular exposure to violent activities and turn to substance abuse that leads to violent tendencies, creating a cycle of violent behaviors (Buggs et al., 2023; Carswell,

2019). Gun violence in predominantly minority communities is often framed by the media as “a convergence of cultural, environmental, and individual shortcomings and immorality” as opposed to a public health concern or race-based socioeconomic issue, thus limiting meaningful structural or policy resolutions (Appiah, 2006; Buggs et al., 2023; Santacrose et al., 2021; Wilf et al., 2023).

Though gun violence affects all communities, “minoritized and marginalized communities, and particularly Black adolescents and young adults, shouldering the greatest toll of death, injury, and resultant trauma” (Buggs et al., 2023). In 2016, the CDC found that Black individuals, who only made up about 13% of the U.S. population at the time, accounted for 53% of firearm-related homicides that year; in contrast, White individuals, who made up about 61% of the population at the time, accounted for 92% of firearm-related suicides that year (Carswell, 2019). In 2020, the CDC found that firearm homicide was the third leading cause of death for individuals between the ages of 15 to 24, but was the second-leading cause of death for Black females in that age group and the leading cause of death for Black males in that age group despite Black males in that age group only making up about one percent of the population at that time (Buggs et al., 2023). According to the CDC, firearm homicide rates in the past three decades were eight to ten times higher for Black individuals than White individuals in the U.S., and for every firearm-related death, four to five Black male individuals were wounded (Carswell, 2019). Youth belonging to a minority or underserved community experience gun violence three to seven times more than White youth, and despite being leaned on for their experience and expertise about racial disparity in gun violence, (Wilf et al., 2023). Responses to gun violence in predominantly minority communities are often through law enforcement or legal intervention, but a 2015 survey by the National Domestic Violence Hotline found that over half of participants stated that police involvement made their situation worse (Buggs et al., 2023; Goodwin & Grayson, 2020). In 2019, 91% of female homicide victims were killed by a male offender they knew; of those, 62% were current or former intimate partners, with those in the Black community having disproportionately higher rates than their White counterparts (Violent Policy Center (VPC), 2021; Gray et al., 2024). A study examining firearms policy and intimate partner homicide found that “firearm legislation disparately benefits more privileged groups, whereas historically marginalized groups experience no significant impact after the passage of state legislation” (Gray et al., 2024). Survivors of gun violence, including their family members, often experience long-term negative psychological effects (Goodwin & Grayson, 2020; Santacrose et al., 2021; Wilf et al., 2023).

### Recidivism

A study on 5,659 federal firearm offenders released in 2010 conducted by the U.S. Sentencing Commission (U.S.S.C.) found that over two-thirds (69.0%) of firearm offenders recidivate within eight years of release compared to less than half (45.1%) of other offenders (U.S.S.C., 2021). Firearm offenders who recidivate were rearrested for similar crimes such as assault (25.9%) and drug trafficking (11.0%) (U.S.S.C., 2021). When considering criminal history and age at release, firearm offenders recidivate at a higher rate than other offenders in every category (U.S.S.C., 2021). Another study conducted on 1,158 firearm offenders and 9,868 other offenders found that firearm offenders were twice as likely to commit another firearm offense compared to other offenders with similar circumstances (Ostermann & Hashimi, 2022). The study conducted by Ostermann & Hashimi (2022) illuminated the “need to expand reentry-based services towards addressing the criminogenic needs of people previously convicted of gun offenses” to reduce recidivism.

A study conducted by Rowhani-Rahbar et al. (2022) found a strong correlation between socio-economic status, income inequality, and firearm violence suggesting community-based programs that provide income support may help reduce recidivism rates. The Miami-Dade County Juvenile Weapons Offenders Program

(JWOP) “has provided a unique multidisciplinary intervention encompassing 100 hours of violence education, behavioral modification, and social mentoring” which resulted in the program having “one of the lowest recidivism rates for reoffense for firearm and non-firearm-related offenses” (Soe-Lin et al., 2020). A retrospective analysis of youth convicted of firearm-related crimes between 2008 to 2016 found that youth who completed the program recidivated at a rate of 10.1% and youth that did not complete the program recidivated at a rate of 22.4% within six months of release (Soe-Lin et al., 2020). A study examining the efforts of the Comprehensive Anti-Gang Initiative (CAGI) found “a significant decline in gun homicide rates post-intervention” in the 12 U.S. cities where it was implemented, but enhanced law enforcement intervention is not sustainable and the CAGI framework is limited in its application (McGarrell et al., 2013). There is evidence that suggests investment into reentry programs that focus on violence mitigation, social adjustment, interpersonal skills, and that address issues with income and housing disparity after release would reduce recidivism rates (Rowhani-Rahbar et al., 2022; Soe-Lin et al., 2020).

## Legal Landscape

### Recent Colorado Firearm Bills

The following bills directly relate to firearm/gun policies; for brevity, bills concerning other topics such as public health that are indirectly related to gun policies were not included in the following lists. To stay up to date on the latest bills, policies, and strategies in Colorado, please visit the [Colorado General Assembly website](#) or the [Colorado Governor Press Release website](#). For information about Colorado gun owner rights, including concealed permits, gun sales, and pertinent laws and policies, visit [Colorado Gun Laws](#).

During the 2023 and 2024 legislative sessions, Colorado passed seven senate bills (SB) and six house bills (HB) that address gun ownership, storage, and responsibilities in the state (organized by category):

### Gun Owner Rights & Requirements

1. **HB23-1219:** “Creates a mandatory three-day waiting period between the purchase of a new firearm and the possession of the firearm.” (Source: [Colorado General Assembly](#), 2023)
2. **SB23-169:** “Increases the minimum age to buy and possess a gun in Colorado to 21 years old.” (Source: [Colorado General Assembly](#), 2023)
3. **SB23-170:** “Expands who is able to petition for an extreme risk protection order to include licensed medical & mental health care providers, educators, and district attorneys. Prior to this action, only law enforcement agencies and household members were able to petition for an extreme risk protection order.” (Source: [Colorado General Assembly](#), 2023)
4. **HB24-1174:** “Concerning permits to carry a concealed handgun ... establishing standards for concealed handgun training classes.” (Source: [Colorado General Assembly](#), 2024)
5. **HB24-1348:** “Concerning a requirement to securely store a firearm in a vehicle.” (Source: [Colorado General Assembly](#), 2024)
6. **HB24-1349:** “Concerning a new excise tax related to firearms ... requiring the excise tax revenue to be spent for mental health services, including for military veterans and at-risk youth, school safety and gun violence prevention, and support services for victims of domestic violence and other violent crimes, and making an appropriation.” (Source: [Colorado General Assembly](#), 2024)
7. **SB24-131:** “Prohibiting carrying a firearm in sensitive spaces recognized by the United States Supreme Court as places at which long-standing laws prohibited carrying firearms.” (Source: [Colorado General Assembly](#), 2024)



## Firearm Dealers & Manufacturers

1. **SB23-168:** *“Allows victims of gun violence to sue the gun industry by removing immunities previously granted to gun manufacturers.”* (Source: [Colorado General Assembly, 2023](#))
2. **SB23-279:** *“Criminalizes the possession, transport, sale, and manufacturing of ghost guns and establishes a process for anyone who owns a ghost gun to legally register the firearm.”* (Source: [Colorado General Assembly, 2023](#))
3. **HB24-1353:** *“Concerning requirements to engage in the business of dealing in firearms, and, in connection therewith, establishing a state firearms dealer permit.”* (Source: [Colorado General Assembly, 2024](#))
4. **SB24-066:** *“Concerning a requirement that certain businesses with relationships with firearms merchants use the appropriate merchant category code.”* (Source: [Colorado General Assembly, 2024](#))

## Firearm Investigations & Law Enforcement

1. **HB23-1143:** *“Concerning measures related to seeking federal authorization for certain immigrants to possess firearms to be a peace officer.”* (Source: [Colorado General Assembly, 2023](#))
2. **SB24-003:** *“Concerning the authority of the Colorado Bureau of Investigation to investigate illegal activity involving firearms, and, in connection therewith, making an appropriation.”* (Source: [Colorado General Assembly, 2024](#))

## Notable Federal Firearm Bills in the 20th & 21st Century

1. **National Firearms Act of 1934:** categorized certain types of firearms as “regulated” and has since updated to include machine guns and accessories such as suppressors. “Regulated firearms and accessories are rarely used in criminal acts because of the additional rules and regulations surrounding their ownership and use” (Cook & Pollack, 2017 as cited in Raissian et al., 2023).
2. **Gun Control Act (GCA) of 1968:** prohibit dangerous or at-risk people (e.g., convicted felons, minors, people committed to a mental institution) from owning or purchasing a firearm. This was enacted following multiple high-profile assassinations, including President John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Kopel, 2011).
3. **Firearm Owners Protection Act of 1986:** contrary to the name, the act focused on gun sellers, not owners; “it made it easier to sell guns without a license and harder to convict dealers for gun sale violations while lowering penalties associated with doing so and limited compliance inspections” (Raissian et al., 2023).
4. **Brady Act of 1994:** bill named after Press Secretary Jim Brady after a life-altering injury following the assassination attempt of President Ronald Regan in 1981. The bill “made it easier to sell firearms by mandating background checks for firearm sales by licensed dealers and strengthened the enforcement of the GCA by creating the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) to identify prohibited persons trying to purchase a firearm from a licensed firearm dealer at the point of sale” (Raissian et al., 2023).
5. **Dickey Amendment of 1996:** prohibited the use of CDC funding for research into gun control. The amendment was largely seen as a response to a 1993 study “that found increased risk of homicide and suicide when guns are in the home” (Kellerman et al., 1993 as cited in Raissian et al., 2023). In 2019, over two decades after the amendment, “Congress approved \$25 million for gun violence



prevention research split evenly between the CDC and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Since then, an additional \$25 million per year has been allocated” for gun control and prevention research as both a criminological topic and public health concern (Raissian et al., 2023).

6. **Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA) of 2005:** “granted the gun industry sweeping immunity against lawsuits” (Raissian et al., 2023). In 2022, “a landmark settlement was reached that represents a potential loosening of PLCAA’s protections to gun manufacturers” following the \$73M settlement reached between the families of the Sandy Hook Shooting and Remington, the manufacturer of the weapon used in the mass shooting (Raissian et al., 2023).

## Relevant Supreme Court Cases

In 2008, the U.S. Supreme Court determined that the “Second Amendment protects an individual’s right to own a gun in their home” (*District of Columbia v. Heller*, 2008). In 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that “courts use text, history, and tradition to assess the constitutionality of gun laws and to seek out historical analogs to contemporary gun policy” (*New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen*, 2022). These cases expanded the overall gun rights of Americans and gave the courts more discretionary power. For additional analysis of these Supreme Court cases the Congressional Research Service published an article on [The Second Amendment at the Supreme Court: Challenges to Federal Gun Laws](#).

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## Appendix

Table A. Colorado population information used for per capita (*rate per 100K*) calculations, 2019-2023.

Year	Age Group	Male	Female	Total
2019	10 to 17	308,452	291,811	600,242
2019	18 to 24	278,819	257,958	536,750
2019	25 to 34	461,392	430,367	891,755
2019	35 to 100	1,487,442	1,544,130	3,031,555
2020	10 to 17	308,624	291,583	600,207
2020	18 to 24	279,516	259,628	539,144
2020	25 to 34	464,861	431,264	896,125
2020	35 to 100	1,511,280	1,567,516	3,078,796
2021	10 to 17	307,010	290,348	597,358
2021	18 to 24	278,675	257,940	536,615
2021	25 to 34	465,071	432,448	897,519
2021	35 to 100	1,529,530	1,587,163	3,116,693
2022	10 to 17	304,690	287,929	592,619
2022	18 to 24	280,649	258,621	539,270
2022	25 to 34	464,306	434,252	898,558
2022	35 to 100	1,545,869	1,604,560	3,150,429
2023	10 to 17	303,086	286,771	589,857
2023	18 to 24	284,925	261,089	546,014
2023	25 to 34	463,408	434,823	898,231
2023	35 to 100	1,570,617	1,630,582	3,201,199

Source: Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), *State Demography Office*, retrieved April 1, 2024.

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