



The Geography of Gun Violence in Connecticut



Introduction

The December shootings in Newtown, Connecticut, have ignited debate and activism regarding gun violence. Residents from around the state and country have come forth in grief to address its impact on children and communities.

When talking about gun violence, it is important to acknowledge that the problem goes beyond mass shooting incidents, and urban residents, in particular, lose loved ones and neighbors to gun violence far too often.

The geographical distribution of gun violence is not random, but heavily concentrated in a few cities and neighborhoods in Connecticut. The consequences of this violence are then also concentrated, leaving urban children and communities to absorb and address them.

Connecticut Is A Safe Place...

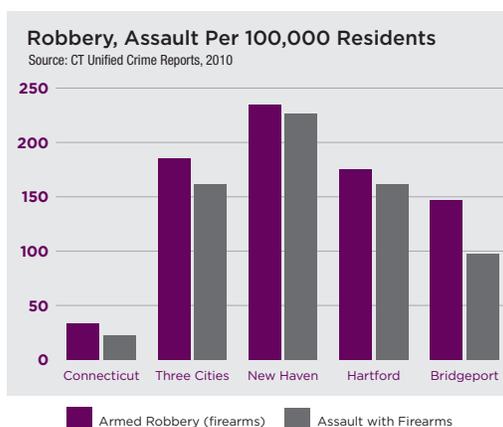
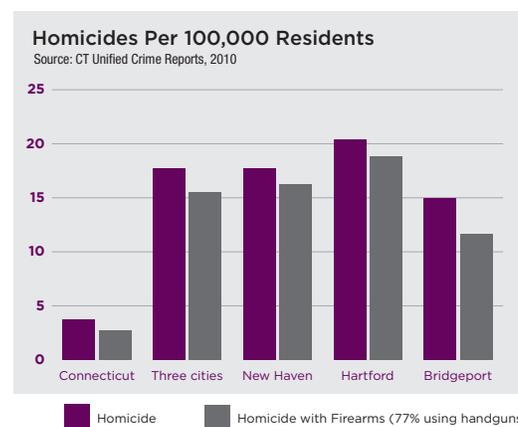
Connecticut overall is a fairly safe state to live in, compared to the United States as a whole. Firearm homicide rates are slightly below the national average (2.71 per 100,000, compared to 2.75 nationally), while aggravated assault and robbery with firearms are well below the national average (35 to 39 and 20 to 43, respectively).¹



But Violence Is Concentrated in Cities.

Crime is not evenly distributed across our state. Our largest cities show a different experience with guns and violence.

Only 11% of Connecticut residents live in Hartford, New Haven and Bridgeport. But these three cities combined are home to 67% of homicides, 62% of armed robberies and 81% of aggravated assaults involving firearms in the state.



In 2010, 62 of the 92 homicides using a firearm in Connecticut took place in these three cities. Of 1,198 armed robberies, 743 took place in these three cities. Of 797 aggravated assaults, 643 took place there.

Sixty-nine percent of gun crimes in Connecticut take place in these three

cities alone. The combined homicide rate in the three largest cities in the state is almost five times higher than in the state as a whole.² If we only consider murders involving firearms, the rate is almost six times higher. Armed robbery rates are also more than five times higher; aggravated assaults with guns involved are seven times higher.

The Causes

The causes behind these disparities are interrelated and complex.

According to economist Richard Florida, gun violence in US cities is strongly correlated with poverty levels (.45) and inequality (.33). The share of the population that is black is also very strongly correlated with gun-related homicides (.72). Unemployment and population density, in contrast, do not appear to be significant contributors. Higher average household incomes and education levels contribute to lower crime rates.³ Recent studies have also shown that environmental pollution, specifically lead, strongly affects crime rates.⁴

The disparities in income and race between Connecticut's suburbs and cities are well documented, and profoundly impact the opportunities available today to children and families.⁵ These disparities have historical roots tracing back to policies such as redlining and government benefits unequally benefitting whites and minorities.⁶

The Consequences

The response to Newtown reminds us that witnessing violence has a profound impact on children's well-being, including difficulties concentrating which may lead to diminished educational and career accomplishments.⁷

The stark concentration of gun violence in our large cities means that urban residents and children deal with these issues on a regular basis. Asked to draw what's outside their window, many Bridgeport children depict guns and death.⁸ Hartford residents have long held rallies and marches to draw attention to the toll of gun violence in their city.⁹

Conclusions

Tragedies like Newtown are a sobering reminder of the very high toll that gun violence has on our state. We should take this opportunity to address gun violence in all of our communities, and especially in our cities, which are disproportionately home to minorities and our poorest residents.

All children are equally deserving of a safe childhood, and we must address the causes and consequences of gun violence as it ravages our state every day. Addressing poverty and inequality in these cities and our state should be a key part of any comprehensive effort to reduce gun violence in Connecticut.

¹ Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 2011

² Crime data for 2010 - Uniform Crime Reports, CT Department of Public Safety

³ Richard Florida "The Geography of U.S. Gun Violence", The Atlantic, December 14, 2012

⁴ Kevin Drum "America's Real Crime Element: Lead", Mother Jones, January 2013 issue.

⁵ <http://www.cfairhousing.org/people-place-and-opportunity-report/>

⁶ <http://www.cahs.org/pdf/OpportunityInCT.pdf>

⁷ <https://simhs.org/news/combating-gun-violence-combat-ptsd-children>

⁸ http://www.cagedfund.org/community_malloy.htm

⁹ courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-hartford-gun-violence-20130111,0,6522700.story



The Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS) works to end poverty and to engage, equip and empower all families to build a secure future. "The Geography of Gun Violence in Connecticut" is one in a series of data and policy briefs. Visit www.cahs.org for more papers and information.