

Network for the Prevention of Gun Violence in the Americas - Policy Brief

Background and Public Health Burden- Gun Violence is a growing global public health problem, especially in the Americas. Firearms and other weapons contribute to countless deaths, devastating harm, permanent disabilities and disruptions of communities that result in humanitarian crises in this region. This region has the highest rates of lethal and non-lethal gun violence in the world.

According to a recent JAMA study, of the 250,000 global gun deaths each year, six countries are responsible for more than half of those deaths. These countries are the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, and Guatemala. In 2018, 47 of the 50 most violent cities in the world were in the Americas, with gun violence regularly constituting between 60% - 80% of homicides (USA Today, 2019).

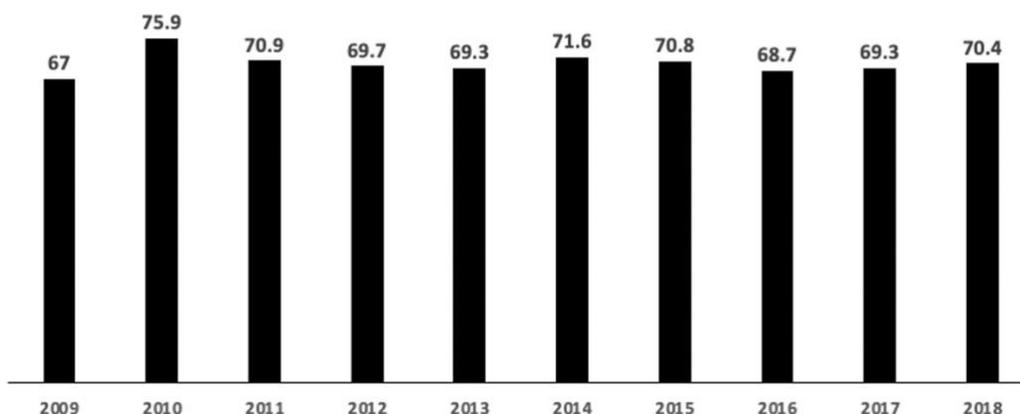
Gun Violence is a public health burden that requires data, research by civil society, and focus to inform programs and policies. One area of focus is small arms: rifles and handguns that are the vectors of this disease burden, and the bullets that they carry.

In Mexico, nearly 100 people are killed in homicides every day. Similarly, around 200 people will be shot and made permanently disabled (Naghavi, 2018). Assault rifles are used in a large number of acts of firearms violence in Mexico; many of these are committed with firearms that are imported into the United States, sold on the U.S. retail market, and trafficked into Mexico.

It is estimated that there are approximately 1 billion small arms in circulation around the world today. About 85 percent of the firearms around the world are estimated to be in the hands of civilians (Naghavi, 2018). Guns are the “vectors” of this epidemic and bullets, when released, are the pathogens, hidden in plain sight.

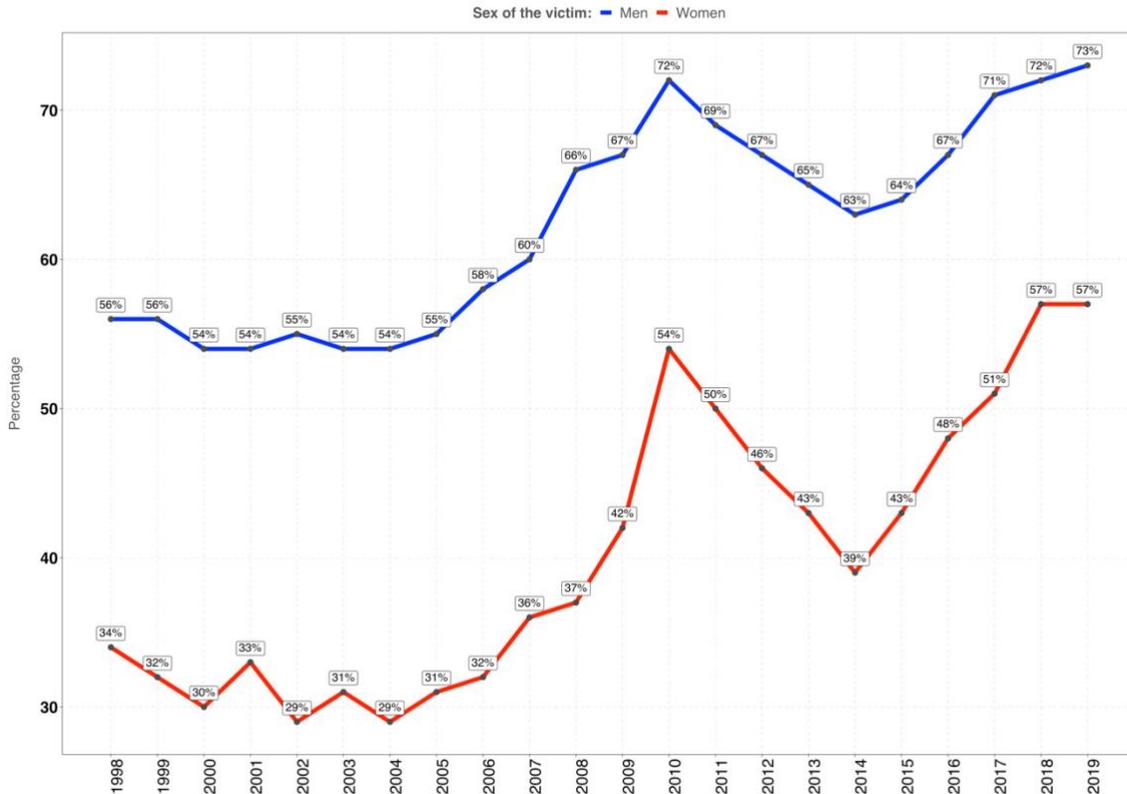
The Vector- In 2019, of the 34,582 homicides in Mexico, 71% of them were attributed to guns, and 70% of illicit firearms recovered in the country were produced or sold in the United States. Through the years, gun homicide incidence rates have continued to climb at an exponential rate. In 2004, 25% of homicides were committed with a gun. Only thirteen years later, in 2017, 66% of homicides were committed with a gun (Santhanam, 2019). This is an egregious number of lives taken by something that could have been averted. This increase is even more drastically when we observe the number of female lives taken by guns. In a span of 21 years, 1998 through 2019, the number of firearm homicides of women and girls rose by 375% (Bancroft, 2021).

Percentage of U.S. Guns Recovered In Mexico and Traced Back to the U.S.



Percentage of homicides committed with firearms in Mexico

Per year, for men and women, respectively



Source: Registros de Mortalidad del INEGI, 1998-2019 & CONAPO. Data processed by Intersecta (intersecta.org).

Recommendations- Strengthening policies and regulations on firearms in the Americas, would begin to stop the exponential trend of deaths due to firearms.

We recommend the following:

Federal Executive Actions Recommendations

- In the United States, the ATF should focus on strengthening the oversight of FFL dealers, not just those in the four Mexico bordering states.
- Improve security requirements and oversight of licensed gun dealers, including detailed background checks, reporting of multiple long gun sales, and reporting of stolen guns.
- Immediately return oversight of all U.S. firearm exports from the Department of Commerce to the State Department.
- Improve sharing gun data, including trace data for recovered guns, throughout the Americas.

Federal Legislative Action

- Prohibit the importation of assault style rifles into the United States. In the United States, enact a federal ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. This will have an effect in Mexico and Central America

Considerations- Most policies that we recommend would not only reduce gun trafficking to Mexico; they would also benefit the United States in reducing firearm violence. Feeling safe at home and in your community is of utmost importance for everyone - across all of the Americas. Several of these policies can be implemented at a state/province level as well at the national level. Improving interagency activities and data sharing will prove valuable information while decreasing firearm trafficking and its impacts.

Citations

- Bancroft, J., Zeoli, A., Vargas, J., Rothman, E., Menaker, T., Logan, T., . . . Barasch, A. (2021, March 18). Guns and violence against women: America's uniquely lethal intimate partner violence problem. Retrieved March 23, 2021, from <https://everytownresearch.org/report/guns-and-violence-against-women-americas-uniquely-lethal-intimate-partner-violence-problem/>
- Naghavi, M., Marczak, L., Kutz, M., Shackelford, K., Arora, M., Miller-Petrie, M., . . . Murray, C. (2018, August 28). Global Mortality From Firearms, 1990-2016. Retrieved March 23, 2021, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6143020/>
- Santhanam, L. (2019, October 09). Gun Deaths Started to Rise After More Than a Decade of Being Stable. Retrieved March 23, 2021, from <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/gun-deaths-started-to-rise-after-more-than-a-decade-of-being-stable>
- USA Today. (2019, August 14). 50 of the Most Dangerous Cities in the World. Retrieved March 23, 2021, from <https://www.usatoday.com/picture-gallery/travel/news/2019/07/24/most-dangerous-cities-world-tijuana-caracas-cape-town/1813211001/>