

The Impact of Gun Violence on Latinx Communities

The recent mass shooting of 38 children and educators at Robb Elementary School—a predominantly Latinx school in Uvalde, Texas—has shined a light on the devastating impact of gun violence in Latinx communities. Tragically, this was not the first time the Latinx community suffered incalculable loss from a mass shooting. In May 2016, a gunman entered Pulse, an LGBTQ+ nightclub holding a Latin night event in Orlando, Florida, where he shot 102 people, 49 fatally, the majority of whom were Latinx. Three years later, 46 people were shot, 23 fatally, when a white supremacist gunman drove 10 hours to a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, to specifically target Latinx shoppers. While these are highly visible incidents that gained significant attention, Latinx people in the United States are dying from gun violence every day and at rates disproportionate to their peers.

Why We Use Latinx

Developed within queer and trans communities, the term Latinx is a gender-neutral word designed to be inclusive of gender-fluid, gender nonconforming, and/or gender nonbinary people, as well as other queer and trans communities on the gender spectrum.

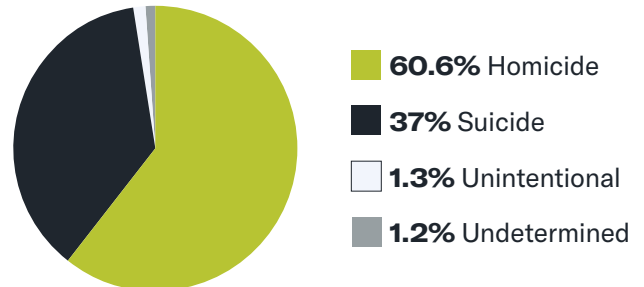
Often used interchangeably, “Latinx” and “Hispanic” have different meanings: Latinx refers to people of Latin American origin, while Hispanic refers to people of Spanish-speaking origin. Latinx is used here when we are referring to both Hispanic and Latinx communities, and Hispanic is used otherwise.

Gun Violence in Latinx Communities

Each year, more than 4,700 Latinx people die from gun violence in the United States—an average of 13 deaths every day—and 13,300 are shot and wounded. Six in 10 gun deaths among Latinx people in the United States are homicides, and Latinx people are twice as likely to die by gun homicide and four times as likely to be wounded by an assault with a gun as white people.

In cities, the majority of gun homicides affect young Black and Latino men in historically underfunded neighborhoods. During the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, when gun violence surged the rate of gun deaths among Latinx people increased 21 percent from 2019 to 2020, and another 13 percent from 2020 to 2021. Latinx communities in cities experienced an even greater burden; an analysis of nine US cities found that more than 85 percent of the 2020 increase in gun violence in those cities occurred in predominantly Black and Latinx neighborhoods.

Gun Deaths Among Latinx People



Source: CDC, WONDER, Underlying Cause of Death, 2018–2021. Homicide includes shootings by police.

The burden of gun violence is also borne by Latinx children and teens, who are three times more likely to be killed by gun homicide than their white peers and are also more likely to be exposed to violence in cities. Young Latinx people are also increasingly impacted by firearm suicide. Each year, nearly 500 young Latinx people die by firearm suicide, and the rate of gun suicide among this population has increased 96 percent over the past decade—higher than the increase among young people overall.

Latinx people in the US have historically been impacted by discriminatory policies and attitudes and were victimized by hate-motivated violence long before the mass shooting in El Paso. Research has found that increases in anti-Hispanic hate crimes followed increases in Hispanic immigration. A Department of Justice report found that Hispanic people experienced a higher rate of violent hate crime victimization than both white and Black people in the last five years studied. Bias against Latinx people, amplified by anti-immigrant policies and language from the past presidential administration, causes direct harm. A 2019 report found that 10 percent of Latinx adults had been victimized by a hate crime in the past year, though only 8 percent of those victimized felt comfortable reporting the crime to police.

While gun violence clearly disproportionately affects Latinx people in the United States, the true scope of the impact is difficult to see. Hispanic people are more likely to have their ethnicity miscategorized in mortality data than white or Black people, and this issue is compounded for certain Hispanic identities. Additionally, the diversity of Hispanic or Latinx identities—it is the largest US ethnic group and includes people of all races—means that understanding exactly how gun violence impacts specific Latinx communities is limited by insufficient collection of race and ethnicity data. Consequently, the full impact of gun violence among Latinx people in cities, states, and communities across the United States is unknown.

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The Disproportionate Impact of Police Violence

Latinx people are also disproportionately impacted by police violence. In an average year, police shoot and kill over 180 Latinx people, and at a rate higher than white people. And police are twice as likely to threaten or use physical force during encounters with Latinx people than with white people. As a consequence, many Latinx people may not feel assured that law enforcement would protect them, and Latinx people generally report less confidence in police than white people. Young Latinx students are also more likely to face negative academic repercussions due to policing in schools, and they are more likely to be arrested than their white peers.

Deteriorated relationships between Latinx communities and law enforcement also present challenges in reporting and solving crimes. Police violence dramatically reduces public confidence in law enforcement, leading community members to see them as part of the problem. Additionally, certain cultural elements shared by many members of the Latinx community, including histories of dictatorial leadership in Latin America and demographic status in the US, make many Latinx people wary of law enforcement.

Aggressive federal immigration policies have caused a chilling effect on willingness to talk to police among Latinx people, and law enforcement's role in immigration enforcement also erodes Latinx individuals' trust in police. Hispanic immigrants, particularly undocumented Hispanic immigrants, are less likely to report being victimized by a crime, and fear of police inquiries into their immigration status or the status of someone they know has also made US-born Latinx people less likely to report victimization. Practices like Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers appearing at hearings for protective orders have made immigrant domestic abuse survivors less likely to report the abuse, and in their lifetime, approximately one in three Latina women have experienced intimate partner violence. Additionally, three in 10 Latina homicides are committed by an intimate partner, and firearms account for over 55 percent of the cause of these deaths.

Policymakers Can Act to Protect Latinx Communities

Policymakers should address the disproportionate impact of gun violence on Latinx people in the United States with action, including by:

- Funding community-based violence intervention programs that work to reduce violence through targeted support and interventions for individuals at the highest risk of shooting or being shot. Local governments can utilize American Rescue Plan funds to support city gun violence prevention.
- Implementing policies that reduce gun violence by police. Law enforcement agencies should have strong guardrails on when police may use force against civilians, ensure police are held accountable when force is used, and prioritize de-escalation, dignity, and respect. Cities may also consider implementing alternative dispatch programs, which connect people in crisis with mental health and social services in difficult situations that police might not have the training to address.
- Prohibiting all people convicted of hate crimes from having guns. While a felony conviction prohibits gun possession under federal law, a hate crime misdemeanor conviction does not. This means that in half of US states, a person convicted of a violent hate crime could legally pass a background check and buy a gun.
- Passing Extreme Risk laws, which allow family members and law enforcement to ask a judge for an order to temporarily remove guns from a person who poses a serious risk of injuring others (or themselves) with a gun. This gives people in crisis a chance to seek help. Extreme Risk laws are proven to reduce rates of suicide and have shown success in preventing potential mass shootings.
- Creating permanent state and local offices dedicated to gun violence prevention and research institutes with a mission to study and recommend policy solutions to combat gun violence, and putting a premium on new data collection infrastructure that can help policymakers to evaluate not only homicide, but also unintentional shootings, nonfatal assaults, and suicide.



Everytown Research & Policy is a program of Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, an independent, non-partisan organization dedicated to understanding and reducing gun violence. Everytown Research & Policy works to do so by conducting methodologically rigorous research, supporting evidence-based policies, and communicating this knowledge to the American public.