



# Issue Brief: Philadelphia Gun Crime

**Smart Justice**

*Making Pennsylvania Safer*

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## Fact Sheet on Gun Crime in Philadelphia

(Stats from the “100 Shooting Review” Committee Report, Philadelphia’s multiagency initiative begun in September 2020)

### General Findings on Shootings

Victims and arrestees for shootings tend to be male, people of color, 18-35 years old, and have a prior criminal history. Most arrestees have used non-criminal city services, with the most common being behavioral health services, and have previously witnessed violence.

Arrestee contacts with city agencies (both criminal and non-criminal) often occur several years prior to being arrested in a shooting incident, with many contacts happening before the age of 18.

Arguments were the most commonly identified shooting motive (50% of shootings). Drug trafficking/transactions was the second most common motivation (18%).

When crime-guns are recovered, they tend to be semi-automatic pistols that were first purchased in Pennsylvania more than three years ago. Because guns may change ownership both legally and illegally, it is not possible to know where the most recent sale was made. Approximately 1 in 4 crime guns were originally purchased outside of Pennsylvania.

Gun sales have skyrocketed in Pennsylvania in recent years. In 2000, fewer than 400,000 guns were sold in Pennsylvania; in 2020, over 1 million were sold, the same year as the COVID-19 lockdowns and riots.

### Clearance Rates in Philadelphia

Clearance rates in shooting cases are low. For example, only 37% of fatal shootings and 18% of non-fatal shootings in 2020 have been cleared in Philadelphia.

Out of 9,042 shooting victims between 2015 and 2020 in Philadelphia, 6,910 have not been cleared.

Arrests for non-fatal and fatal shootings tend to happen within the first few months. 75% of non-fatal shooting arrests occur within 61 days; 75% of fatal shooting arrests occur within 125 days of the shooting.

Non-fatal shootings are more likely to be solved in months with fewer shootings, when the investigation is done by a Philadelphia Police Department unit with more detectives, and where the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) investigated the incident.

There has been a marked increase in the number of people arrested in Philadelphia for illegal gun possession (without the accusation of any additional offense). That increase is largely due to a doubling in arrests for illegal possession of a firearm without a license since 2018. Arrests for possession of a firearm by a prohibited person have also increased during that time period, but more modestly.

There is a large disparate impact in illegal gun possession arrests: approximately 4 in 5 people arrested for both primary types of illegal gun possession are Black. Additionally, much of the increase in illegal gun possession arrests have been of young people carrying firearms without a license.

### *Fact Sheet on Gun Arrests*

Conviction rates in shooting cases have fallen steadily since 2015. Between 2016 and 2020, the fatal shooting conviction rate dropped from 96% to 80%. It dropped less sharply, from 69% to 64%, in non-fatal shootings.

Conviction rates in both types of illegal gun possession cases have fallen steadily since 2015 (from about 65% in 2015 to about 45% in 2020); notably, this declining trend is a long-term trend predating the pandemic, and the court closure alone will not explain this.

### *Bail and proceedings*

Both the initial and final bail amount set by courts in illegal possession of firearms cases declined between 2015 and 2019 but increased in 2020 and 2021. As bail decreased along with the increase in the use of unsecured bail, the proportion of cases where bail was posted increased for both types of illegal firearm possession.

In 2021, the median initial bail for illegal gun possession by a prohibited person was \$150,000 and was \$50,000 for illegal possession without a license.

The rearrest rate for a new gun crime after being released from jail during the pendency of their original illegal possession of firearm case is relatively small but rearrests may nonetheless be concerning.

At the time of September 2021 when the analysis was conducted, the rearrest rate increased slightly from 8% in 2015 to 11% in 2019 but returned to 8% in 2020. The rearrest rate for a new violent gun crime remained steady at around 2%-4% during the study period, while the rearrest rate for a new illegal gun possession offense rose from 3%-4% in 2015-2018 to 6% in 2019-2020. 1% or fewer of the re-arrests were for shootings during the pendency of their original case.