

Section V

Weapons Used in Violent Crime

The surge in the level of violent crime in the Nation over the past decade corresponded with a significant rise in firearm usage by the criminal population. The main focus of this study is to examine this dynamic nationally and regionally and to discuss trends for other types of weapons used in violent crimes. The data in this report are based on Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) weapon information collected for the offenses of murder, robbery, and aggravated assault. These crimes constitute 95 percent of all violent crimes. Weapon data are not collected for forcible rape. The weapon categories are (1) firearms, (2) knives or cutting instruments, (3) other dangerous weapons, and (4) personal weapons (hands, fists, feet, etc.)

National Experience

During 1994, based on crimes reported to law enforcement agencies, there were 544,880 offenses in the United States in which victims were murdered, robbed, or assaulted with firearms. In other words, nearly 1 out of 3 (31%) murder, robbery, and aggravated assault offenses collectively involved firearms as the weapons used. Further, Table 5.1 shows that from 1985 to 1994 violent crimes committed with firearms increased by a much wider margin than those committed with other weapons. During this 10-year time period, firearm-related offenses were chiefly responsible for the overall 42-percent increase in murders, robberies, and aggravated assaults. When addressing the trends for the remaining weapon types, the increases did not exceed those for the firearm category. In contrast to crimes of violence nationwide, property crime (which is not weapon-oriented) increased only 9 percent during the period 1985 to 1994.

Weapon statistics have been collected since the mid-1970s by the UCR Program for each violent crime offense with the exception of forcible rape. Chart 5.1 shows that considering weapon types, the 1990s have become the decade most prone to firearm use in history for the violent crimes studied. The trends for firearm use in murders, robberies, and aggravated assaults were remarkably similar in pattern. After remaining stable or declining during the period 1980–1985, firearm-related violent crimes followed a distinctive upward trend with the number of firearm-related aggravated assaults showing the greatest increase—76 percent—in 1994 as compared to the 1985 level. (Table 5.1.)

Recently, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, Department of Justice, released a study concluding that of the victims of non-fatal violent crimes who faced an assailant armed with a firearm, 17 percent were injured in some manner (pistol-whipped, shot, etc.). Three percent of those confronted with a firearm suffered gunshot wounds. When applying this statistic to the 1994 UCR figure of 528,575 firearm-related robbery and

Table 5.1
Percent Changes in the Numbers of Murders, Robberies, and Aggravated Assaults, by Weapon Types, United States, 1994 over 1985

Offense	Total	Firearms	Knives or cutting instruments	Other dangerous weapons	Personal weapons
Murder	22.8%	46.3%	-25.6%	9.4%	-4.9%
Robbery	24.3%	46.3%	-10.5%	27.8%	15.9%
Aggravated assault . . .	54.8%	75.6%	21.5%	58.2%	63.2%
Total	42.1%	59.5%	11.7%	52.6%	37.5%

Table 5.2
Number of Firearm-Related Violent Crimes and Shooting Victims, United States, 1994

Offense	Firearms used to commit crime	Victims Shot
Murder	16,305	16,305
Robbery and Aggravated Assault . .	528,575	15,857*
Total	544,880	32,162

*According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, Department of Justice, victims of nonfatal violent crimes are shot and wounded 3 percent of the time when the offender is armed with a firearm.

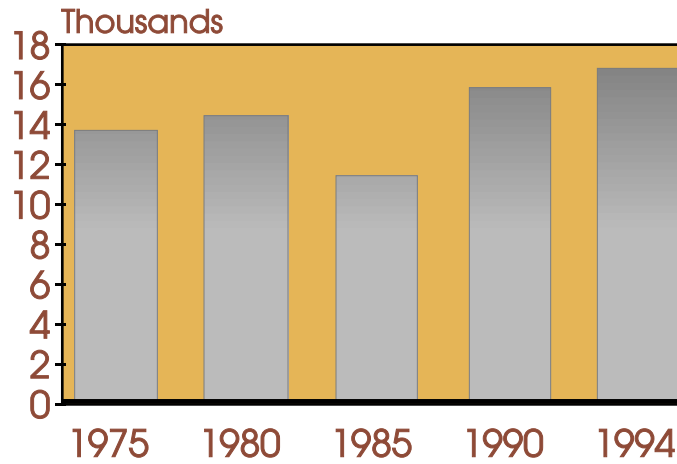
aggravated assault offenses, an estimated 15,857 offenses involved victims who suffered gunshot wounds. Moreover, when including firearm-related murders during 1994, there were an estimated 32,162 offenses where victims were shot (see Table 5.2). It should be noted that the aforementioned figures do not include criminals who have been shot during the commission of a crime.

Firearm-related violent crimes that result in injury or death are having a substantial impact on the Nation's public health system. A recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, United States Department of Health and Human Services, indicated that 92 percent of patients who required hospitalization due to firearm-related injuries survived. Since firearm-related violent crime is the fastest increasing category, the number of hospital admissions due to these crimes may adversely affect the cost of health care since most of these victims are taken to trauma centers. The American Hospital Association reported in 1994 that approximately 23 percent of the Nation's 6,650 hospitals have trauma centers, up from 11 percent in 1991.

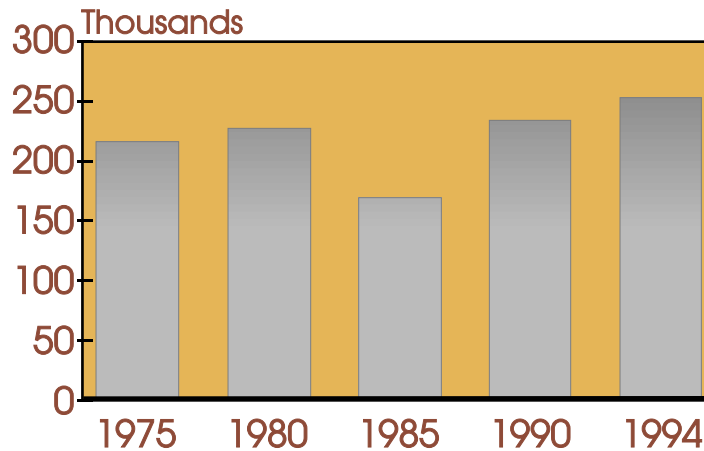
The advent of trauma centers in nearly all major urban areas may have influenced the recent decline in the Nation's

CHART 5.1

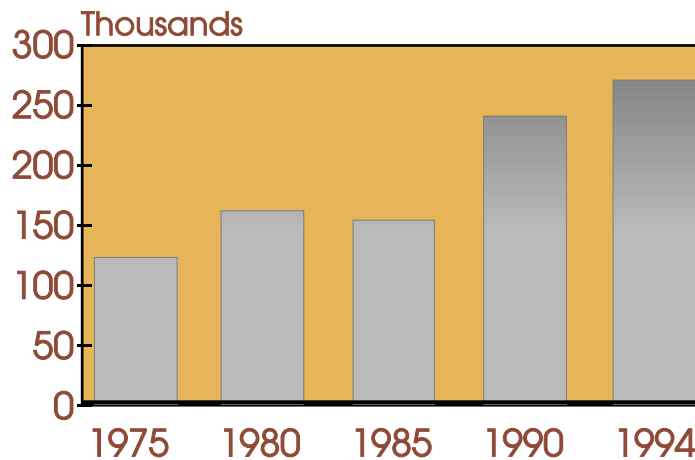
Number of Murders by Firearm, United States, 1975 - 1994



Number of Robberies by Firearm, United States, 1975 - 1994



Number of Aggravated Assaults by Firearm, United States, 1975 - 1994



homicide rate. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that of people hospitalized with gunshot wounds, 9 out of 10 survived, as earlier mentioned. This may, in part, account for the recent significant decline in the number of homicides nationwide. Ostensibly, this is an area of criminal justice research that needs further examination.

Accompanying the unprecedented level of firearm usage in the violent crimes studied is the dramatic increase in the number of juveniles arrested for weapon violations. Specifically, estimates for the years 1985 and 1994 show juvenile arrests for this crime increased 113 percent nationwide. As shown in Table 5.3, substantial increases in arrests for weapon violations were experienced by all racial groups over the 10-year timespan. The overall increase for total weapon violation arrests was 43 percent, with adult arrests for this category increasing 30 percent for the 10-year period under consideration. It should also be noted that total juvenile violent crime arrests in 1994 rose considerably—80 percent—as compared to the 1985 total.

Regional Experience

An escalation in the violent crime volume was experienced by every region in the Nation over the past decade, 1985 to 1994. As with the national experience, the upward trend in violent crime for each region was fueled by significant increases

in firearm-related murders, robberies, and aggravated assaults, as shown in Table 5.4. The Midwestern and Western Regions experienced exceedingly large increases for murders and aggravated assaults committed with firearms. When considering the trends for weapon types other than firearms (e.g., knives, clubs, hands, fists, etc.), there were no across-the-board increases as was experienced in the firearm category.

The South, the most populous region in the Nation, had a disproportionately high percentage of firearm-related murders and aggravated assaults during 1994. More specifically, while the South constituted 35 percent of the United States population in 1994, it accounted for 43 percent of murders and 44 percent of aggravated assaults that were firearm-related (see Chart 5.2). In contrast to the Southern Region, the Northeast recorded a disproportionately low number of firearm-related murders and aggravated assaults, 15 percent and 10 percent, respectively. This region accounted for 20 percent of the Nation's population in 1994. The regional percent distribution for firearm-related robberies mirrored the Nation's population distribution percentages.

The Western and Midwestern Regions experienced the most consistency in their proportions of firearm-related murders, robberies, and aggravated assaults in 1994, as delineated in Chart 5.2. The percentage of the total was roughly the same for each crime category.

Table 5.3

Percent Changes in the Number of Juvenile Arrests for Weapon Violations, by Race, United States, 1994 over 1985

Race	Number of Arrests for Weapon Violations		Percent Change 1994 over 1985
	1985	1994	
White	20,594	39,197	90.3
Black	8,787	22,820	159.7
Other	436	1,488	241.3
Total	29,817	63,505	113.0

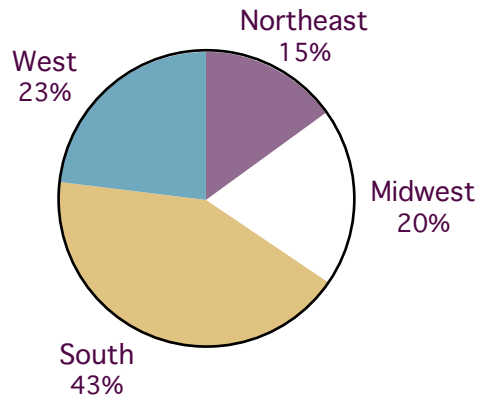
Table 5.4

Percent Increases in the Number of Firearm-Related Murders, Robberies, and Aggravated Assaults, by Region, United States, 1994 over 1985

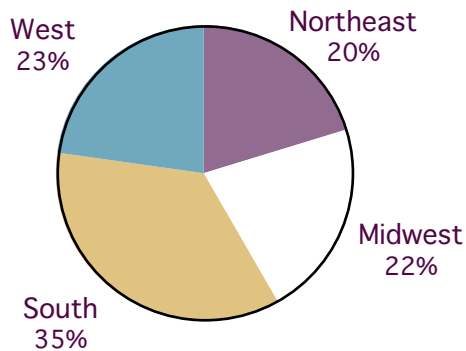
Region	Murder	Robbery	Aggravated assault
Northeast	49.6%	28.3%	52.0%
Midwest	45.9%	49.7%	79.9%
South	34.8%	57.4%	69.4%
West	71.6%	45.2%	97.0%

CHART 5.2

Distribution of Firearm Murders by Region, United States, 1994



Distribution of Firearm Robberies by Region, United States, 1994



Distribution of Firearm Aggravated Assaults by Region, United States, 1994

