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Colorado saw a nearly 30% spike in homicides in 2020, new data shows

Even with increase, per capita homicide rate still lower than highs of late 1980s, early 1990s



Aaron Ontiveroz, Denver Post file

Denver Police Department crime scene investigators look for evidence on the perimeter of a shooting scene near 21st and

Larimer Streets on Nov. 19, 2018. Police were investigating a shooting in Denver's LoDo neighborhood that left one person dead and sent four others to the hospital.

By **ELISE SCHMELZER** |

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New statewide Colorado crime data shows more people were killed in homicides last year than in any other year in at least the past decade.

That statistic is one of many found in [data released this week by the Colorado Bureau of Investigation](#) that offers the first glimpse at how the pandemic, an economic recession and massive protests against racist policing affected crime across the state in 2020. Previously, data was only available from individual agencies.

The crime data will play a part as Colorado lawmakers once again debate significant changes to the state's criminal legal system. Some have pointed to spikes in certain crimes as a reason to not implement changes to the system.

Statewide trends often are driven by changes in the largest communities. Both Denver and Aurora saw a significant increase in homicides and shootings last year.

The release Tuesday of the data signals a shift in how the Colorado Bureau of Investigation will release crime statistics moving forward. The agency will now release data on a rolling, monthly basis.

"This shift in the availability of the statistics not only ensures Colorado is more aligned with the FBI's quarterly reporting practices, but more importantly it provides increased transparency involving statewide crime data, and eliminates the lag that occurred in the past," CBI Director John Camper said in a news release.

Homicides rose by 29% compared to 2019

Colorado law enforcement recorded 293 criminal homicides in 2020, up 29% from the 227 recorded in 2019. That's more than three times the 95 recorded in the state in 2010. The number of homicides generally has been on an upward climb over the past decade, data from CBI shows.

But even the 2020 rate of 5 homicides per 100,000 Colorado residents is lower than the per capita rates seen in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Homicide rates in the state have generally fallen since 1985, [according to data collected by the FBI](#).

Colorado recorded a homicide rate of 7 per 100,000 residents in 1986, the highest rate seen in the past 35 years. The 2020 rate is the highest recorded since 1995.

At least 44% of people killed in homicides in 2020 were killed by someone they knew, the state data shows.

More aggravated assaults, fewer sex assaults

Aggravated assaults also rose in Colorado in 2020 compared to the year before, though sex assaults dropped. Aggravated assaults include any attack that caused serious bodily injury to the victim, like non-fatal shootings and stabbings.

Aggravated assaults rose by 18% in a single year, from 14,102 in 2019 to 16,572 in 2020, state data shows. The 2020 number is the highest recorded in at least the last 10 years.

Victims reported 5,638 sexual assaults in 2020, the lowest number reported since 2014.

Theft, burglary remain within range of recent years

The number of theft and burglary cases grew between 2019 and 2020, though the 2020 numbers were lower than those recorded in other recent years.

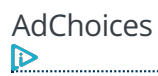
Colorado recorded 112,768 theft cases in 2020, up from 111,085 recorded in 2019. But the 2020 number is less than the 122,942 cases recorded in 2018.

Burglary cases also rose, from 19,842 recorded in 2019 to 22,509 in 2020. The 2020 number is lower than the 23,158 cases recorded in 2016, however.

Data about the location of burglaries shows most of the increase between 2019 and 2020 was caused by more burglaries of commercial properties. Residential burglaries remained relatively flat between 2019 and 2020 and even lower than the years prior to 2019.

But data about theft tells a different story. Thefts from residential properties grew by 18% from 2019 to 2020 while thefts from commercial properties dropped by 14% in that same time.

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