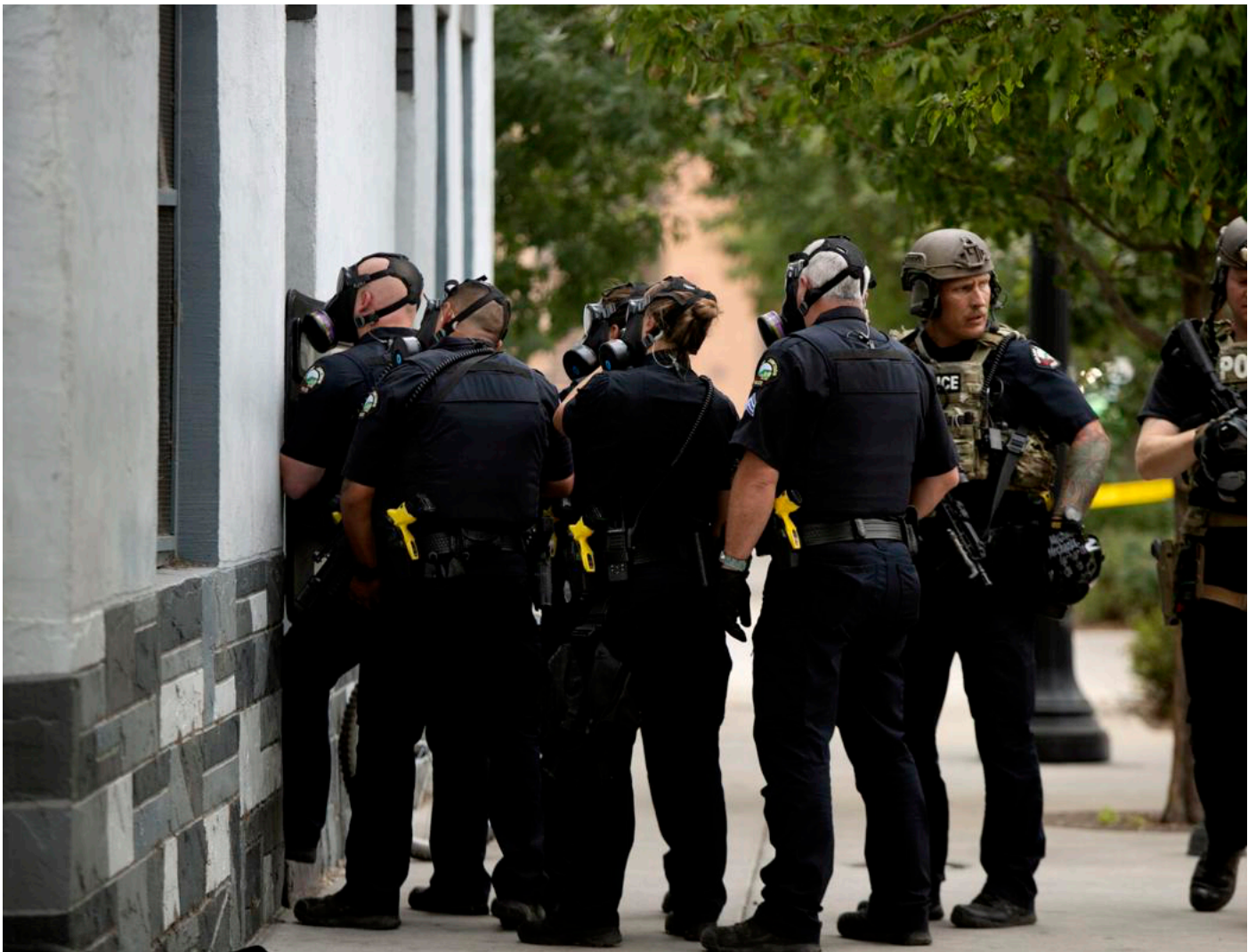


https://www.gjsentinel.com/news/western_colorado/local-violent-property-crimes-up-in-2020/article_c80c6748-8108-11eb-bb2d-a74285181d23.html

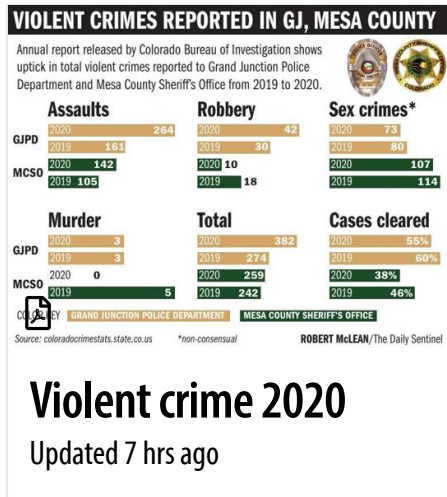
Local violent, property crimes up in 2020

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Increases in aggravated assaults last year, many including assaults on police officers, contributed to a jump in violent crime in Grand Junction last year, with assaults also responsible for an increase in violent crimes investigated by the Mesa County Sheriff's Office.

Both the city and county also saw increases in property crimes during the pandemic year of 2020, although driving-under-the-influence and drug-related cases were down for the year.

The Colorado Bureau of Investigation on Tuesday announced its posting of 2020 crime data for hundreds of law enforcement agencies statewide at <https://coloradocrimestats.state.co.us/tops/>. It said that statewide there was about a 4 percent increase in total crimes reported, much of it due to a 10.4% surge in property crimes. Violent crimes were up 6.5%.

Grand Junction had 382 violent crimes last year, up from 274 the previous year, due in good part to 264 cases of aggravated assault for the year, versus 161 in 2019. Grand Junction police Chief Doug Shoemaker said that there were 89 assaults on department officers last year, compared to an average of 18 per year over the last decade.

CBI's site showed that violent crime cases handled by the sheriff's office rose to 259 last year from 242 in 2019. Aggravated assault cases the office handled grew to 142 from 105 between the two years.

The city saw three murder cases last year, the same as in 2019, while the sheriff's office had no murder cases in 2020, versus five the previous year. Sex offense cases were down in both the city and unincorporated Mesa County, falling to 73 from 80 in the city, and to 107 from 114 for the county. City robbery cases rose to 42 from 30 from year to year, and sheriff cases fell to 10 from 18.

Motor vehicle thefts soared in the city, to 301 from 159, and to 194 from 130 in the unincorporated county.

City burglary cases rose to 380, from 283 in 2019, and sheriff cases rose to 289 from 249.

Theft cases also were up for both departments.

However, DUI cases fell in the city to 218, from 264 in 2019, and dropped to 87 from 98 for the county.

Drug cases in the city fell to 372 from 544, and for the sheriff's office, to 146 from 323, excluding drug paraphernalia cases that are categorized separately in the CBI data.

One factor influencing crime numbers, and arrest rates, in Mesa County and elsewhere in the state last year was the tightening of standards for jailing suspects due to COVID-19 concerns. Shoemaker said warrant arrests in the city were down 45% last year, felony arrests were down 23%, and misdemeanor arrests were down 13%.

“There’s a lot of challenges there, honestly, with what we can and can’t do in terms of taking people to jail,” he said.

Shoemaker said that while the changes in jail standards were understandable when COVID-19 numbers were bad, he thinks it’s important with the pandemic easing that those people who need to be in jail end up there.

He said his officers are routinely dealing with people who know what the current standards are for jailing people and are taking advantage of that to repeatedly commit crimes.

He thinks the jail situation, people’s displeasure with things related to COVID-19, and the continued issues surrounding George Floyd’s death at the hands of Minneapolis police last summer all are contributing to disrespect for officers, unwillingness to comply with their orders, and assaults on officers.

Shoemaker said it’s “absolutely frightening in terms of kind of what our women and men (in uniform) are out there dealing with right now.”

Shoemaker is speaking out against Senate Bill 62, a measure he said would make crimes, such as burglaries of businesses, not even arrestable.

The chief said he believes the bill is “completely disregarding the rights of victims in these cases.”

Shoemaker says city patrol officers worked more than 3,700 hours of overtime in the last six months helping address crimes in the community, and the department's investigative unit averaged 149 hours of overtime per month last year.

Dennis Webb