

Washington, D.C. **GUN VIOLENCE PROBLEM ANALYSIS**

Summary Report

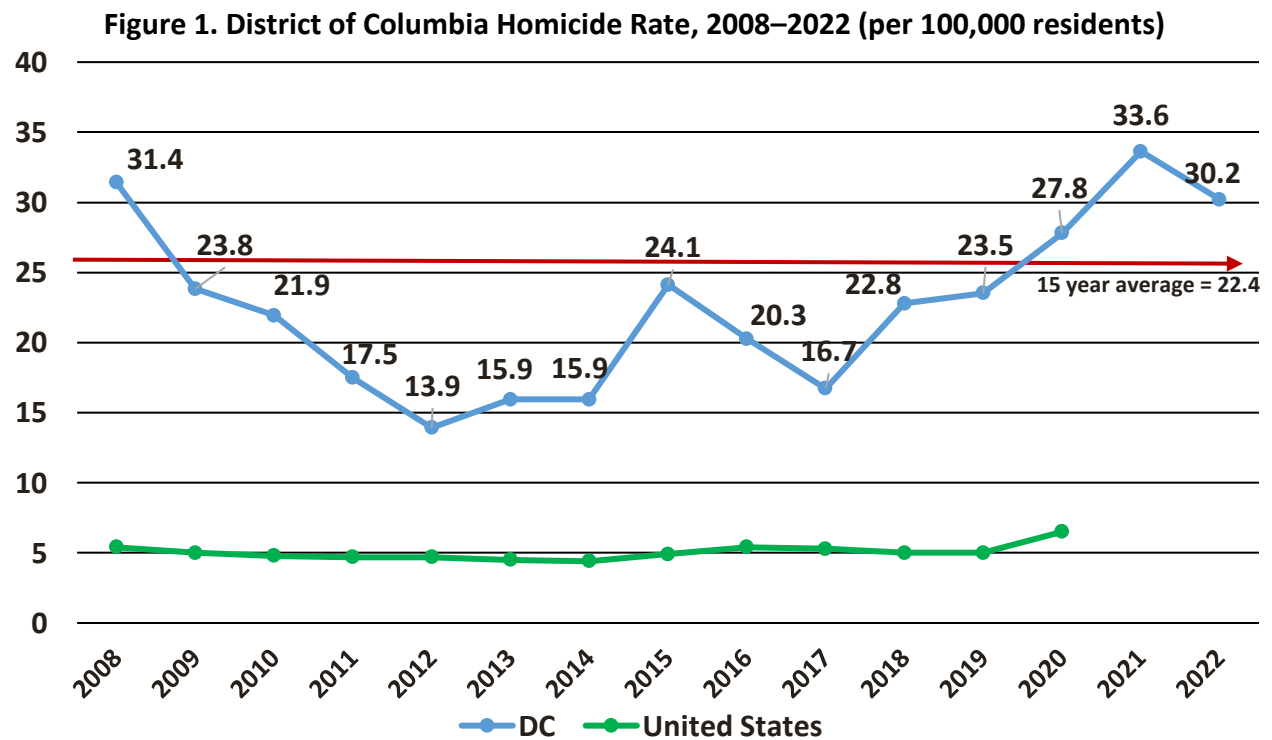


December 2023

Washington, DC Gun Violence Problem Analysis Narrative Summary Report

The National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) partnered with the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC), the District of Columbia’s Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE), and other local law enforcement and supervision agencies to conduct a detailed analysis of shootings and homicides in Washington, DC. A Gun Violence Problem Analysis (GVPA) is a set of analytical exercises designed to support the implementation of violence reduction strategies; the GVPA is a research-based methodology used in several cities nationally.

Homicides have risen gradually in the District since 2017. This trend continued through 2022 as DC and other US cities experienced increased violence. The homicide rate in DC was about 180% higher in 2022 (30.2) than it was in 2017 (16.7) (Figure 1). Unlike most of the country, DC has experienced an even higher rate of homicides in 2023.



This Gun Violence Problem Analysis examined 406 homicides occurring in the District of Columbia from January 1, 2021 through December 31, 2022, and 587 nonfatal injury shootings that occurred from January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022. This study assessed all criminal

shootings and homicides; accidental and justifiable incidents were excluded from our sample. The goal of this analysis is to examine the circumstances of each shooting event itself, explore the characteristics of individuals involved, and identify the networks associated with the highest risk of violence. In addition, the research team conducted interviews and focus groups with more than 70 MPD employees, including officers, detectives, and crime analysts, as well as with Violence Interrupters to better understand dynamics influencing shootings across the District. This work establishes a common understanding of the local violence problem that can help guide policy; tailor interventions to those at the highest risk of violence; and inform the work of civic, community, and criminal justice leaders to reduce gun violence in the District of Columbia.

Before summarizing these findings, it is important to define several terms used throughout this report:

- **Homicide:** In this report, the term “homicide” refers to criminal homicides in which a killing was intentional or due to criminal negligence (i.e., murder or manslaughter).
- **Nonfatal Shooting:** In this report, “nonfatal shooting” refers to shooting incidents involving criminal intent in which a victim was struck by a bullet discharged from a firearm, resulting in a nonfatal injury.
- **Community Supervision:** This term refers to the supervision of a defendant or convicted offender in the local community rather than in physical custody within a jail or prison. In DC, for the adult population this includes the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) and Pretrial Services Agency (PSA), and for juveniles it includes the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) and the Court Social Services Division (CSSD).
- **Group:** In this report, the term “group” refers to the wide range of dynamics and structures present in criminally active street groups. Individuals at high risk for violence are likely to associate within particular groups and social networks, ranging from more highly organized, formal gangs to more loosely associated, informal neighborhood crews. Labels aside, attention to groups is important because criminally active groups, gangs, crews, and social networks tend to drive a substantial amount of violence.

Victims and Suspects of Homicides and Nonfatal Shootings

Demographics

The victims and suspects of homicides and nonfatal shootings in the District of Columbia are primarily male, Black, and between the ages of 18–34. Within the period of this study, nearly 91% of victims and suspects in homicides and 88% of victims and suspects in nonfatal shootings were male. **About 95% of victims and suspects in homicides and 94% of victims and suspects in nonfatal shootings were Black**, despite Black residents comprising only 46% of the overall population in the District (Table 1). Approximately **60% of homicide victims/suspects and 59% of nonfatal shooting victim/suspects were between the ages of 18–34**, with a mean age of 31.7 and 28.9, respectively (Table 2). Across homicides and nonfatal shootings, both victims and suspects were demographically similar overall.

Table 1. Homicide and Nonfatal Shooting Victims and Suspects: Sex and Race

	HOMICIDES (N=406)			NF SHOOTINGS (N=587)			DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA POPULATION
	Victims (n=418)	Suspects (n=259)	Victims & suspects (n=677)	Victims (n=692)	Suspects (n=142)	Victims & suspects (n=834)	
Sex							
Male	88.0%	95.7%	90.9%	87.4%	89.3%	87.7%	47.4%
Female	12.0%	4.3%	9.1%	12.5%	10.0%	12.0%	52.6%
Race							
Black	94.7%	96.2%	95.2%	92.8%	97.9%	93.5%	46.0%
White	2.9%	1.3%	2.3%	3.5%	1.4%	3.1%	37.5%
Hispanic	2.3%	1.7%	2.0%	-	0.7%	0.1%	10.5%
Asian	0.2%	0.9%	0.5%	0.4%	-	0.4%	11.3%
Other	-	-	-	1.3%	-	1.0%	

Table 2. Homicide and Nonfatal Shooting Victims and Suspects: Age

	HOMICIDES (N=406)			NF SHOOTINGS (N=587)		
	Victims (n=418)	Suspects (n=259)	Victims & suspects (n=677)	Victims (n=692)	Suspects (n=142)	Victims & suspects (n=834)
Age						
17 & under	6.7%	9.6%	7.8%	12.7%	25.8%	14.8%
18-24	20.7%	30.4%	24.3%	28.2%	27.3%	28.0%
25-34	35.3%	35.2%	35.3%	32.4%	25.8%	31.3%
35-44	19.0%	16.8%	18.2%	15.8%	11.4%	15.1%
45-54	9.9%	4.8%	8.0%	6.0%	6.1%	6.0%
55 & older	8.4%	3.2%	6.5%	5.0%	3.8%	4.8%
Mean age	33.4	29.0	31.7	29.3	26.4	28.9

Criminal Justice System Involvement

A victim or suspect was noted to have prior criminal justice system involvement if they were arrested in DC or other jurisdictions, regardless of conviction, prior to their involvement in the homicide or shooting. Of all adult and juvenile homicide and nonfatal shooting **victims**, 61% had prior criminal justice system involvement. Of all adult and juvenile homicide and nonfatal shooting **suspects**, 82% had prior criminal justice system involvement.

Prior arrests count unique arrest events. Offense totals count the number of unique criminal offense types, even if they occurred within the same arrest event. For example, if a detective investigating a burglary identifies a suspect and goes to arrest the suspect and during the arrest, also finds illegal drugs on the suspect that would count for one arrest, but two offenses. NICJR did not count multiple offenses related to a single event. For example, in an armed robbery arrest, the robbery and gun possession were counted as a single arrest and single offense. If an arrest was solely for a low-level traffic offense or civil infractions, it was not included.

Incarceration and community supervision status is presented for a) only those with prior criminal justice system contact and b) the entire population of victims and suspects.

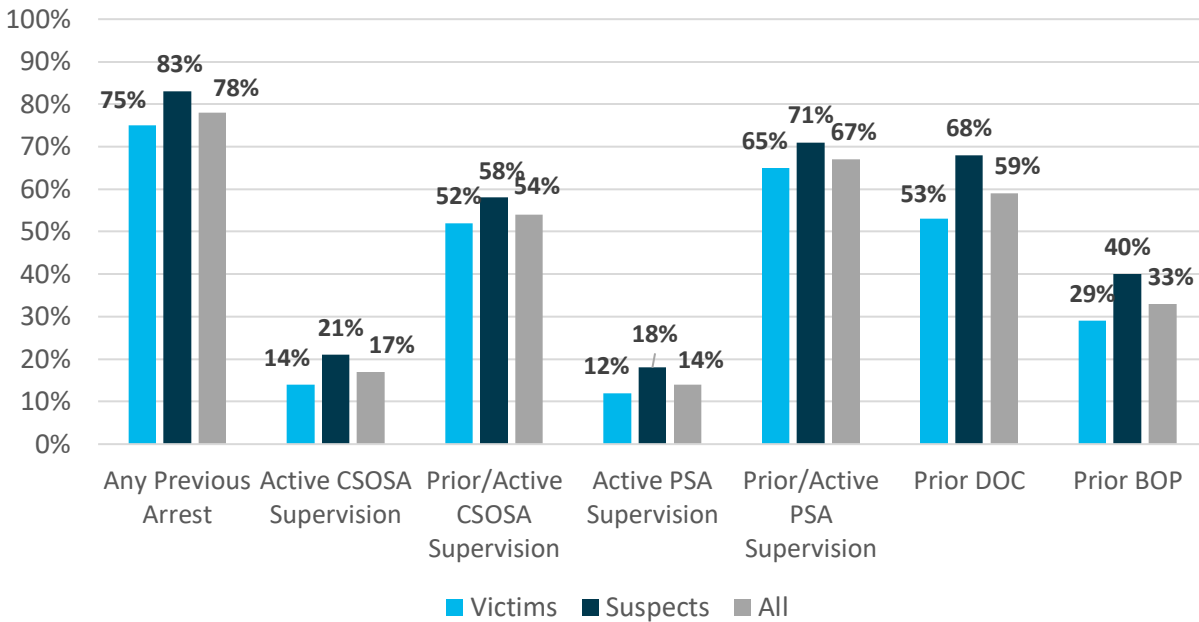
Homicide Victims and Suspects

Approximately 78% of homicide victims and suspects were known to the criminal justice system prior to the incident. Among all victims and suspects, about 59% had a prior DC Department of Corrections (DOC) release, and 33% had a prior federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) release (Figure 2).

Among all homicide victims and suspects, 17% were under active supervision by CSOSA and 54% had been under prior/active CSOSA supervision before the incident. About 14% of victims and suspects were under active supervision by PSA and 67% had been under prior/active PSA supervision before the incident.

Given the high percentage of those arrested who have been incarcerated and on supervision shows the vast majority of individuals were involved in homicides and shootings were not just arrested, but also prosecuted.

Figure 2. Victims and Suspects of Homicides: Criminal Justice System Involvement



Community Correctional Supervision in the District

CSOSA supervises adults who are on probation, parole or supervised release after being convicted of a crime in Washington, D.C. PSA supervises adults who have a pending criminal case in Washington, D.C. This report does not capture supervision by other jurisdictions or for victims and suspects who were 18 and older and supervised by D.C.’s juvenile justice supervision authorities (CSSD and DYRS).

Of those who were known to the criminal justice system prior to the homicide, most victims and suspects had been arrested for drug (avg. 2.7), disorder (avg. 2.0), and property (avg. 1.9) offenses (Figure 3). **Overall, most victims and suspects with prior criminal offenses had been arrested about 10 times for about 12 different offenses by the time of the homicide.** This count only refers to adult arrests; juvenile arrests were not included. In addition, the majority of arrests for victims and suspects occurred in the District; a smaller number of arrests occurred outside of DC (Figure 4).

Figure 3. Victims and Suspects of Homicides: Average Number of Prior Offenses

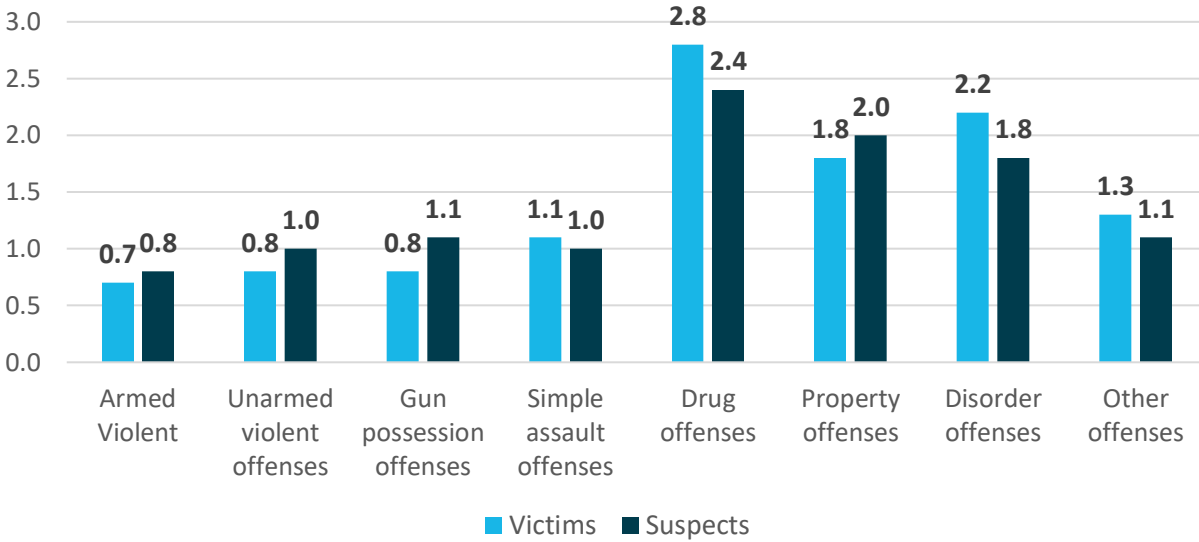
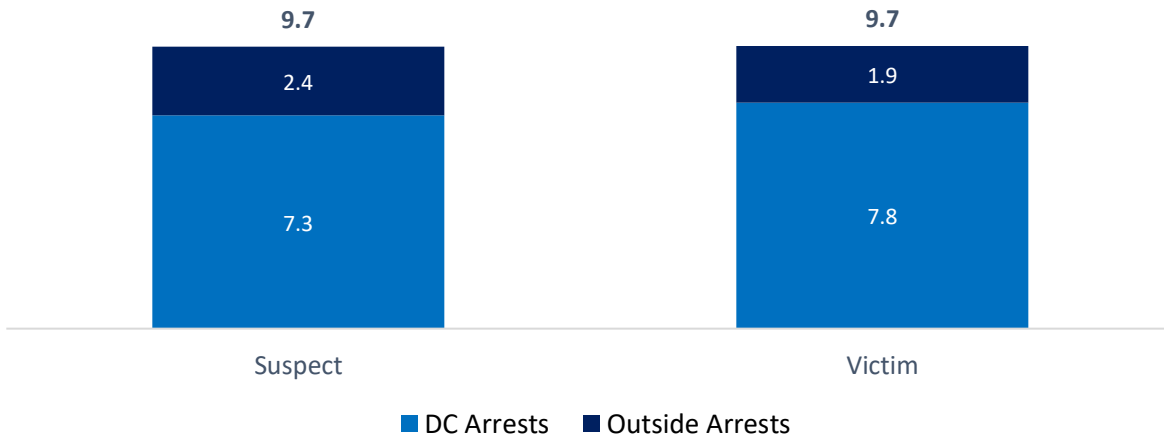


Figure 4. Victims and Suspects of Homicides: Average Number of Arrests Inside and Outside DC



In addition, data from DC hospital emergency rooms (ER) show that almost one-quarter (24%) of homicide victims had visited an ER for a prior violent victimization, with 10% having visited an ER in the District for a prior violent victimization within one year of being killed.

Nonfatal Shooting Victims and Suspects

Approximately 61% of nonfatal shooting victims and suspects were known to the criminal justice system prior to the incident. Among all victims and suspects, about 45% had a prior DOC release and 22% had a prior BOP release (Figure 5).

Among all nonfatal shooting victims and suspects, 17% were under active supervision by CSOSA and 43% had been under prior/active CSOSA supervision before the incident. About 7% of victims and suspects were under active supervision by PSA and 51% had been under prior/active PSA supervision before the incident.

Of those who were known to the criminal justice system prior to the shooting, most victims and suspects had been arrested for drug (avg. 2.0), property (avg. 2.0), and disorder (avg. 1.9) offenses (Figure 6). **Overall, most victims and suspects with prior criminal offenses had been arrested about 9 times for about 11 different offenses by the time of the shooting.** This count only refers to adult arrests; juvenile arrests were not included. The majority of these arrests occurred inside the District; a smaller number of arrests occurred in other cities (Figure 7).

Figure 5. Victims and Suspects of Nonfatal Shootings: Criminal Justice System Involvement

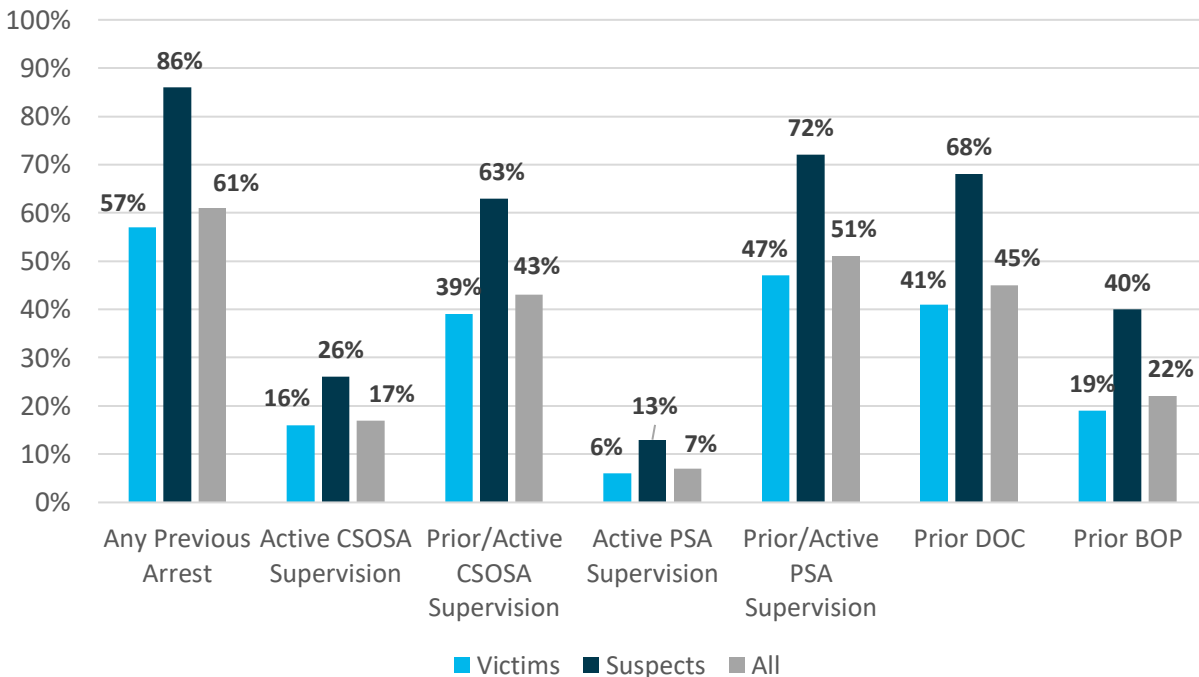


Figure 6. Victims and Suspects of Nonfatal Shootings: Prior Offenses

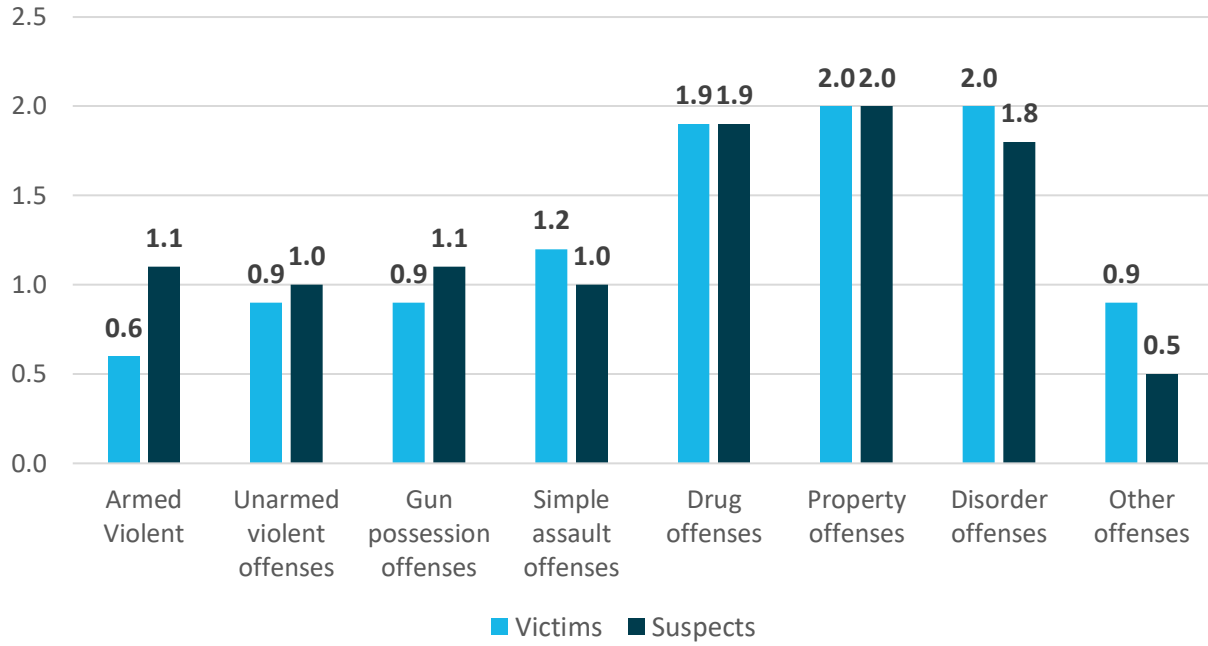
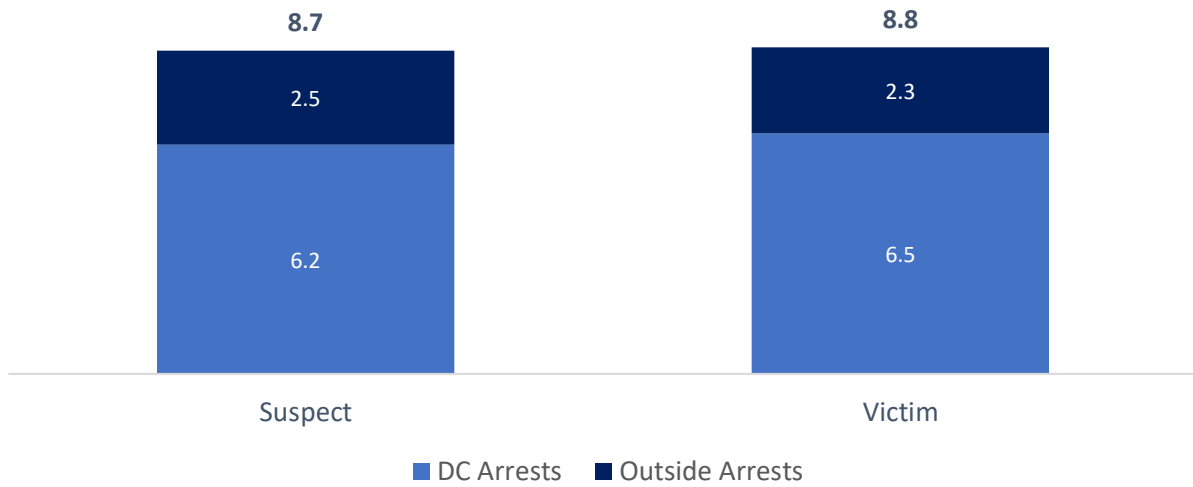


Figure 7. Victims and Suspects of Shootings: Average # of Arrests Inside and Outside DC



Prior Case Outcomes for Homicide and Nonfatal Shooting Victims and Suspects

In the District, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Columbia has jurisdiction to prosecute all adult felony offenses. For misdemeanor adult offenses, jurisdiction is divided between the U.S. Attorney’s Office and the D.C. Office of the Attorney General, depending on the offense. For example, the U.S. Attorney’s Office has jurisdiction to prosecute simple assault, theft, drug possession, and unlawful entry, while the D.C. Office of the Attorney General has jurisdiction to prosecute disorderly conduct, possession of an unregistered firearm, and traffic offenses.

As shown in Table 3, most homicide victims and suspects and nonfatal shooting suspects had at least one prior case prosecuted and disposed in DC Superior Court, and most had at least one prior conviction in a criminal case. There was a smaller proportion of nonfatal shooting victims with prior dispositions or convictions in DCSC.

Table 3. Percent of Adult Victims & Suspects with Previous Disposed Cases and Convictions in DC Superior Court¹

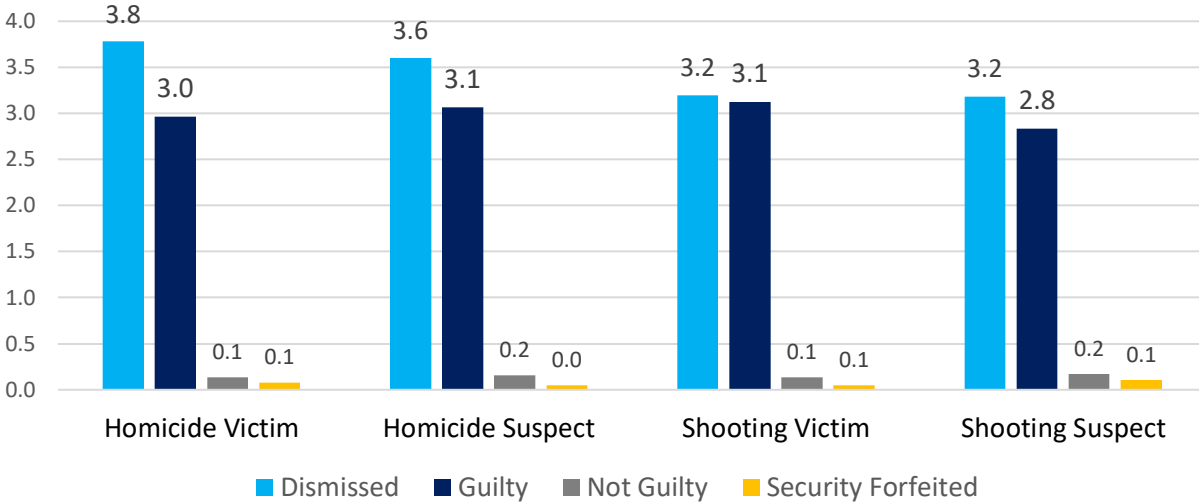
	Prior Case Disposed	Prior Conviction	Prior Felony Conviction*
Homicide All	69%	55%	48%
Suspect	74%	59%	54%
Victim	66%	53%	44%
Non-Fatal Shooting All	50%	40%	35%
Suspect	73%	58%	54%
Victim	46%	36%	32%
Grand Total Homicide & NFS	59%	47%	41%

*Conviction in a felony level DCSC case. Felony level determined based on DCSC court codes.

On average, homicide suspects had 6.9 prior criminal cases disposed, homicide victims had 7.0 prior dispositions, nonfatal shooting suspects had 6.3 prior dispositions, and nonfatal shooting victims had 6.5 prior dispositions. An analysis of these cases shows that, on average, more than half of the prior cases were dismissed.

¹This analysis excludes cases that were sealed or expunged, such as convictions that were set aside per the District’s Youth Rehabilitation Act.

Figure 8. Average Number of DCSC Dispositions by Type²



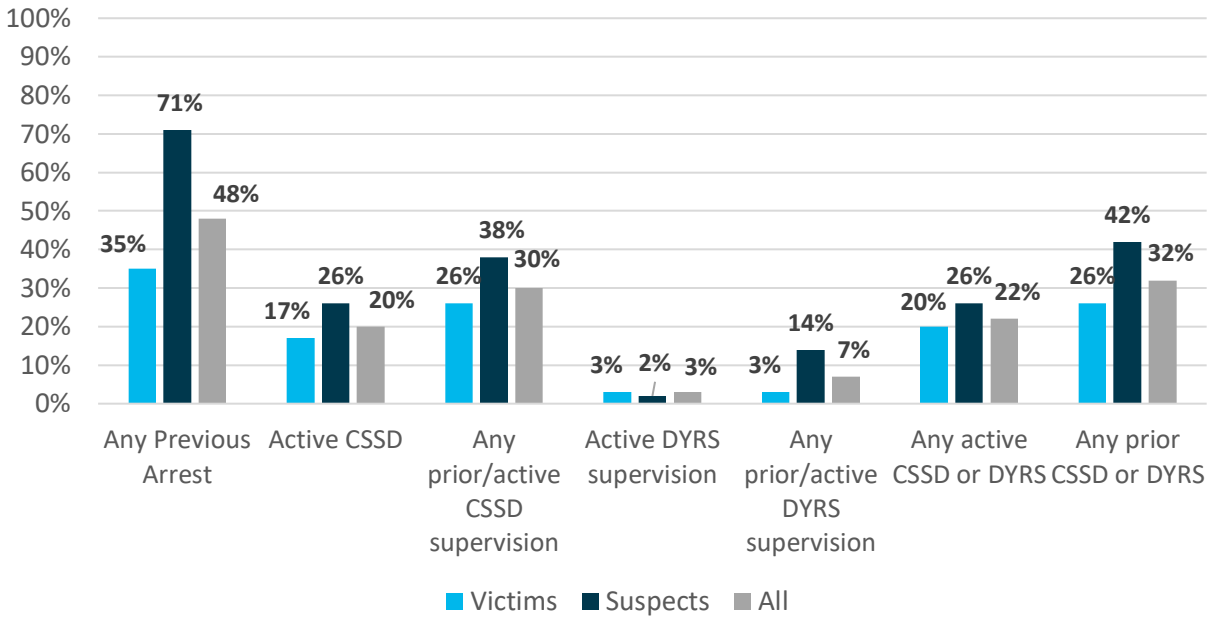
Charged cases can be dismissed for a host of reasons, including in circumstances where the defendant is held accountable. For example, some defendants have multiple pending cases. In the District, a common way of resolving these cases is for defendants to enter global plea agreements, and a charged case or cases may be dismissed in connection with this global agreement. Cases may be dismissed where a case is transferred to U.S. District Court for federal prosecution, or after a defendant successfully completes a diversion program. Other reasons for the dismissal of cases include the loss of an essential witness; discovery of new evidence; essential evidence being suppressed after the court found a constitutional violation by law enforcement; a jury being unable to reach a unanimous verdict; a judicial finding that the defendant is not competent to stand trial; and a court finding of no probable cause.

Juvenile Victims and Suspects

Approximately 48% of juvenile victims and suspects of homicides and nonfatal shootings were known to the criminal or juvenile justice system prior to the incident. Among all juvenile victims and suspects, 20% were under active supervision by CSSD and 30% had been under prior/active CSSD supervision before the incident. About 3% of victims and suspects were under active supervision by DYRS and 7% had been under prior/active DYRS supervision before the incident (Figure 9).

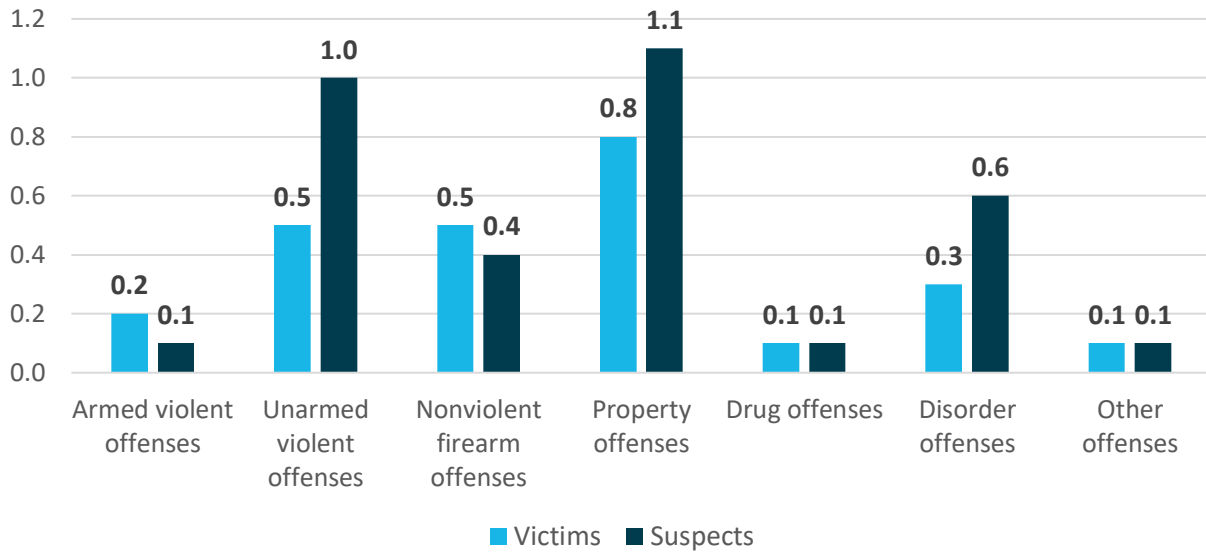
²This analysis excludes cases that were sealed or expunged, such as convictions that were set aside per the District’s Youth Rehabilitation Act. Security forfeited refers to cases whereby a person charged with certain misdemeanor crimes may post and simultaneously forfeit an amount of money and thereby obtain a full and final resolution of the criminal charge: <https://code.dccouncil.gov/us/dc/council/code/sections/5-335.01>.

Figure 9. Juvenile Victims and Suspects: Criminal Justice System Involvement



Among those who were known to the criminal or juvenile justice system prior to the incident, most juveniles had been arrested about three times, primarily for property (avg. 0.9) and violent (avg. 0.7) offenses (Figure 10). Of their arrests, an average of two included felony offenses.

Figure 10. Juvenile Victims and Suspects of Homicides: Average Number of Prior Offenses



A Note About Juvenile Involvement in Gun Violence

One of the challenges of understanding gun violence in the District over the past two years is the need to recognize two mutual realities. One is that there has been an extraordinary increase in the number of juveniles involved in shootings and homicides in the District; however, data shows that juveniles continue to constitute a small portion of overall shootings. Further confusing the issue is that although the vast majority of shooting victims and suspects are adults, the majority of carjacking arrests in the District are of juveniles. But few carjacking incidents result in a shooting. This can confuse the general public as many people consider carjacking gun violence, while others may only define actual shootings as gun violence.

Incident Analysis

Homicides

This section analyzes the circumstances of homicide events from January 2021 through December 2022 (n=406). Among these, 85% were gun homicides. About 31% of homicides were confirmed to involve group members as victims, suspects, or both. In another 39% of homicides, the group involvement of victims and/or suspects was unknown (Figure 11). Therefore, at least 31% and potentially up to 70% of homicides involved group members as victims, suspects, or both, though the exact percentage is unknown.

This analysis collected homicide circumstance information from case summaries and detective interviews (Table 3). Homicides most often occurred as a result of personal disputes between known individuals (27%). Group-related conflicts motivated 12% of homicides, and instant disputes were involved in 9%. Group members were involved in a significant share of other crimes that resulted in homicides, such as drug robberies (43%), drug-related disputes (40%), and robberies (30%).

Figure 11. Homicide Circumstances and Group Involvement

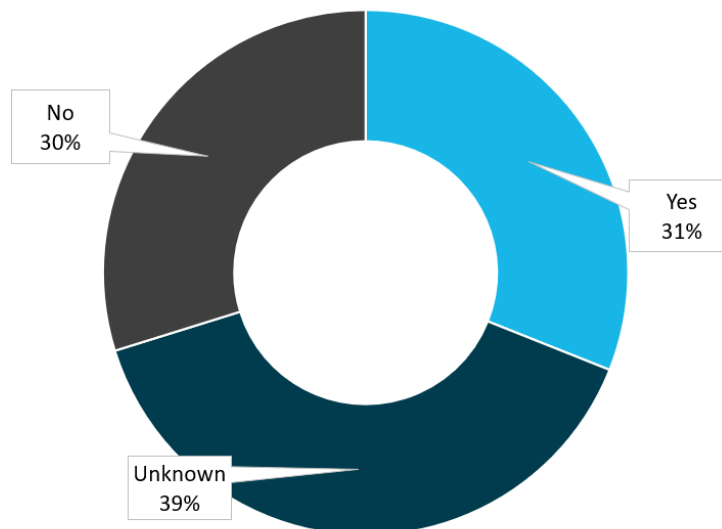
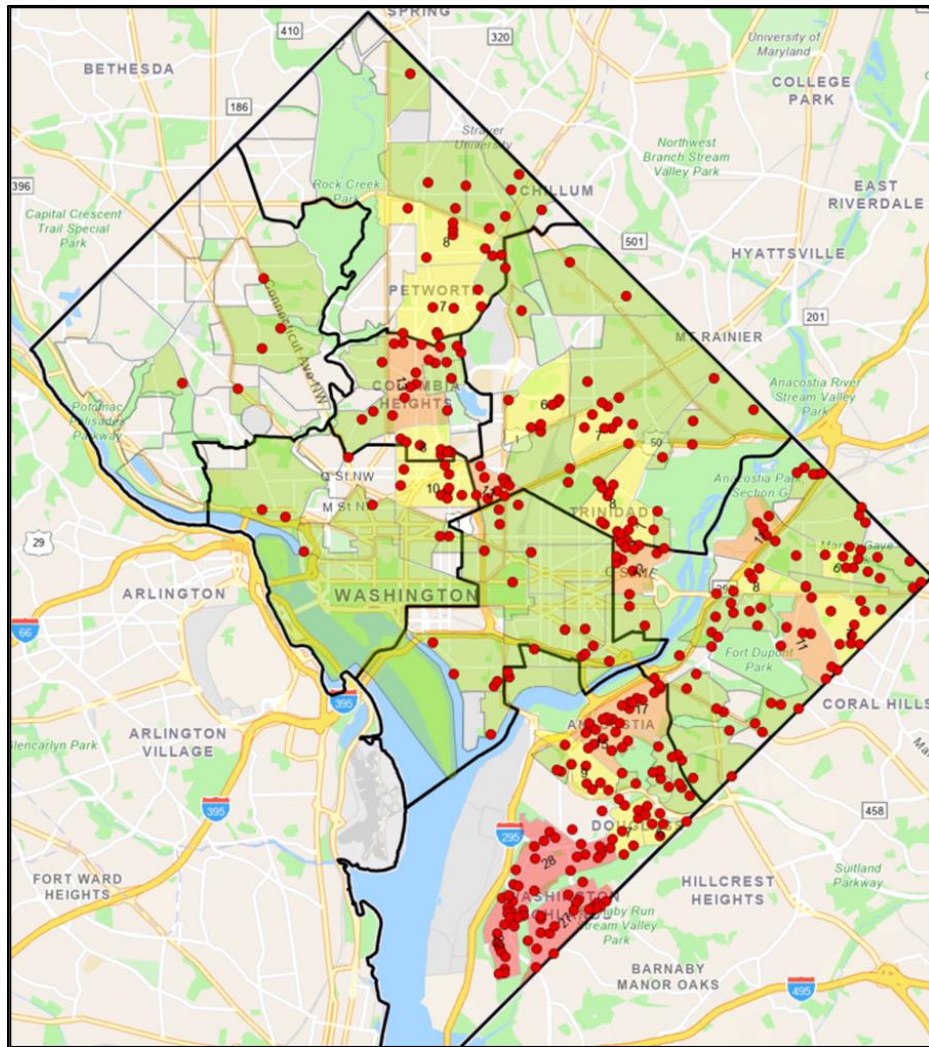


Table 4. Homicide Circumstances and Group Involvement

	All homicide circumstances		Proportion group-member involved	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Personal dispute	110	27.0%	27	24.6%
Group-related conflict	50	12.3%	50	100%
Instant dispute	38	9.3%	7	18.4%
Robbery/Carjacking	37	9.0%	11	29.7%
Drug-related dispute	25	6.2%	10	40.0%
Domestic dispute	22	5.4%	1	4.6%
Drug robbery	7	1.7%	3	42.9%
Child abuse	4	1.0%	0	0.0%
Mental illness	4	1.0%	0	0.0%
Internal group dispute	3	0.7%	3	100%
Drug-induced	3	0.7%	0	0.0%
Unknown	103	25.2%	14	13.6%
TOTAL	406		126	31.0%

Figure 12. Homicides January 2021 through December 2022



High-Risk Groups and Networks

At least 84 groups were identified among the victims and/or suspects of homicides and nonfatal shootings that took place from January 2021 through December 2022. In homicide events, between 19–34% of victims and 38–44% of identified suspects were group involved. However, there was also a large percentage of individuals whose group/gang affiliation status was unknown. Given that most officers and community intervention workers interviewed for this study reported that group/gang involved individuals had an increase in gun violence, **it is likely that the portion of shootings involving group/gang members is higher than the data suggests.**

Many groups/gangs in the District of Columbia are heavily engaged in narcotics sales. Many conflicts between groups and group members may evolve from drug-related disputes and social media conflicts. Group associations were noted to be growing more unstable and dynamic, with associated members frequently crossing districts, changing affiliations, and/or forming alliances with individual members across multiple groups.

One group in particular is a newly formed clique which calls itself Fox 5. This group has become a significant driver of gun violence but it has also proved challenging to track, because it is not geographically situated and has had many changes and internal conflicts. [This video](#), which was made by Fox 5 rivals and has also been posted on social media, displays some of the conflicts and shooting incidents involving Fox 5 and their rivals. (NICJR was conflicted with including this video as it includes images and language that are extremely disturbing, but it also can be helpful in understanding the violence dynamics in the District).

Key Interview Take Aways

While poverty, substandard education, generational trauma, lack of resources, and neighborhood dysfunction are significant root causes of violence, the focus of this analysis was to understand the near-term drivers of gun violence.

NICJR conducted small group and individual interviews with more than 70 MPD officers selected for their particular knowledge and expertise of gun violence throughout DC, as well as with street outreach workers and Violence Interrupters. Among interviewees, there was nearly unanimous agreement on the primary driver of gun violence in the District. There is a deadly mix of group/crew/gang members making music videos taunting or disrespecting their rivals that are posted on social media, and those videos spark or further inflame neighborhood conflicts that escalate into shootings. And while the music videos were identified as the primary issue, other comments and pictures posted to social media by group members also lead to shootings.

Officers and Violence Interrupters also identified other leading causes of shootings, including drug sales and drug use; robberies; personal disputes like fighting over a young woman, although that often includes guys who are also in groups/crews; and the increased availability of firearms, including ghost guns.

Numerous officers throughout the District also identified two issues that combine to create the feeling of impunity among people who engage in violence that have emboldened them to commit further acts of violence: a high bar for making arrests and a reduction in proactive policing.

The first issue is the feeling from officers that the criminal justice system is broken in the District. They cited an extremely high bar for making arrests, claiming it has been elevated to a beyond a reasonable doubt standard usually reserved for convictions in court. Officers also complained of some cases not being charged or when they are, the defendant being allowed to go home to await court proceedings.

The second issue officers noted was a significant reduction in proactive policing due to what they describe as a police department and DC Council that have made policy decisions that create strict rules where officers fear being disciplined or even fired for violating the new rules. For instance, the District enacted a unique consent search law that requires an officer to read a legal rights statement before conducting a consent search. There is also a relatively high threshold for when officers are allowed to chase a suspect in a vehicle, which officers claim has nearly ended vehicle chases.

Taken together, officers, and surprisingly even many Violence Interrupters, described a feeling of impunity among many people on the streets that may be encouraging criminal behavior.

Summary Findings and Recommendations

Similar to the findings of the previous GVPA, most gun violence in DC continues to be tightly concentrated on a small number of very high risk, young Black male adults who share a common set of risk factors, including:

- significant criminal justice history, including prior or active correctional agency supervision;
- a connection to a recent shooting (within the past 12 months);
- prior victimization in violence; and
- involvement in street crews/groups.

Some shootings in DC are also connected to robberies, carjackings, and drug sales. To the extent that many DC shootings are tied to drugs and drug sales, this is a unique dynamic that is less evident in many other cities examined by NICJR.

The data shows that while adults still make up the vast majority of nonfatal shooting suspects, there has been a significant increase in the number of juvenile suspects, increasing to 25.8% of those arrested for non-fatal shootings. Notably, it is very possible that nonfatal shooting suspects and homicide suspects are more alike than the available data suggests. Given the relatively small percentage of nonfatal shooting suspects identified (24%) versus homicides suspects (64%) and the likelihood that juvenile suspects are less sophisticated than adults, it is possible that juvenile suspects are overrepresented in the limited sample size of nonfatal shooting suspects.

As mentioned earlier, data gleaned from interviews with homicide detectives indicated that there are now fewer people involved in shootings who are connected to groups/crews/gangs. It is possible that this is true, but it is also possible that this reflects limited information known by detectives at the time of the investigation. Interviews with officers involved in street-level enforcement efforts as well as with community-based violence interrupters indicate there has been an increase in shootings conducted by people associated with groups/crews/gangs.

Even with a possible decrease, there are still many people involved in shootings who are members or associates of street groups/gangs. While the motive for a shooting may not be a traditional gang war, often shootings are precipitated by a petty conflict over a young woman, a simple argument, or the now ubiquitous social media slight. In particular, social media posts of music videos that promote certain neighborhoods or crews and also “dis” other crews or individuals often spark a series of comments and competing videos that escalate into shootings. All of this is made possible and exacerbated by the wide availability of firearms and the culture of resolving conflicts through violence.

Recommendations:

The District should establish a clear citywide strategy that focuses intentional, structured, and intensive intervention efforts on those individuals identified as being at very high risk of gun violence involvement. This strategy will require frequent and regular assessment of recent shootings and identification of individuals likely to retaliate based on the findings of this report. The strategy will also require dedicated and high quality management as well as continual quality improvement and data-driven performance management. In order to achieve this, the District should implement the following:

- **Shooting Review:** MPD should hold a weekly review of all shootings that occurred in the previous seven days. A group of 30–50 officers most knowledgeable about shootings, in addition to staff from supervision agencies (CSOSA, PSA, etc.), should discuss every shooting incident, determine if there is a likelihood of retaliation, and develop plans to prevent any retaliatory shootings both with enforcement efforts and referrals to the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE).
- **Focused Community Intervention:** ONSE should focus its People of Promise team as well as a seasoned team of Violence Interrupters solely on the individuals identified through the Drivers of Gun Violence assessment as well as referrals from the Shooting Review.
- **Focused Enforcement:** MPD should continue to expand its efforts to focus enforcement specifically on shootings and homicides. MPD should increase the number of trained officers in its Violent Crime Suppression Unit, especially in a unit focused strictly on gun violence, like the former Violence Reduction Unit.
- **Improved Intelligence Gathering and Clearance Rates:** In order to increase intelligence and knowledge about shootings in the District, as well as improve the clearance rate of nonfatal shootings, MPD should create a Nonfatal Shootings Investigations Unit. This has become a national best practice where a well-staffed unit of detectives only investigate nonfatal shootings.