Gun Violence: How Big Is The Problem In Maine

December 8th, 2004
“Gun violence” includes the following:

- Violent Crimes with Guns
  - Homicides, Robberies, Aggravated Assaults

- Domestic Violence Where Guns Are Present or Used to Threaten or Intimidate

- Illegal possession of firearms

- Suicides
Data Sources and Methodology

• Violent Crimes with Guns
  – FBI – Uniform Crime Reports
  – Maine Department of Public Safety

• Domestic Violence Where Guns Are Present or Used to Threaten or Intimidate
  – Maine Department of Public Safety
  – U.S. Attorney’s Office research

• Illegal possession of firearms
  – Examination of pre-sentencing reports of federal firearm cases from 2002-2003

• Suicides
  – Maine Medical Center – CDC
  – Maine DHHS, Bureau of Health, Office of Data, Research and Vital Statistics
Gun Culture in Maine

- 1,277,284 population
- 1,250,122 total guns
- 1 gun per person
  - 71% long guns (rifles, shotguns, etc.)
  - 29% handguns
  - At least one firearm in almost half of the 626,000 households

*Statistics based on 2000 statewide survey*
Gun Culture in Maine

- Gun Usage
  - Sporting and recreation
  - Hunting
    - 172,626 hunting licenses issued in 2000
    - Traditional part of family life
Violent Crimes with Guns
In 2003, Maine had the lowest rate of firearm use in violent crimes in the country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total # of firearm crimes</th>
<th>Percent of violent crimes w/ firearm</th>
<th>Overall chance of being a firearm victim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>1 in 14,136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>1 in 6,212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>1 in 4,823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States*</td>
<td>252,645</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>1 in 853</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* - excluding Florida, Illinois, DC, Kentucky
Since 1996, the annual number of violent crimes with a firearm in Maine has remained under 100.
Over the last 8 years, more than half the violent crimes with a firearm in Maine have been robberies.

Percent of Total Violent Crimes w/ Firearms, 1996-2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Murder w/ Firearm</th>
<th>Robbery w/ Firearm</th>
<th>Agg. Assault w/ Firearm</th>
<th>% of Total Violent Crimes w/ Firearm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 yr. Ave</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Maine Department of Public Safety 1996-2003
Since 1996, nearly half the homicides in Maine were committed with a firearm.

Homicide by Type of Weapon, 8 Year Avg. 1996-2003

- Firearm, Shotgun, Handgun, Rifle: 44%
- Hands, Fists, Feet: 20%
- Knife, Cutting Instrument: 18%
- Blunt Instrument: 9%
- Strangled: 3%
- Fire/Smoke Inhalation: 2%
- Unknown: 4%

Maine had an average of 21 Murders between 1996-2003.

Source: Maine Department of Public Safety 1996-2003
Domestic Violence Where Guns Are Present or Used
Between 1996-2003, more than half the homicides in Maine were DV related.

Domestic Violence Homicides, 1995-2003

Source: Maine Department of Public Safety 1996-2003
Firearm violence in households with a domestic violence abuser

- **What is a Protection from Abuse Order?**
  A PFA is a court order which provides legal protection for a person in or just out of an abusive relationship.

- In a limited study of 5 courts during 6 mos. in 2003-2004, 18% of individuals against whom Protection from Abuse Orders were issued threatened to use a firearm against their victims.
Extrapolating firearm violence in households with a domestic violence abuser

- In FY 2003 there were 6,502 Protection from Abuse orders in Maine.

- 18% of 6,502 Protection from Abuse Orders (n=1170 PFAs) where the defendant threatened to use a firearm.
Since 1999, the percent of NICS denials for persons with a DV conviction and/or a PFA order has increased.
Suicides
Suicides in Maine

- Between 2000-2002 nearly 90% (481) of violent deaths in Maine were suicides.

- The teen suicide rate in Maine is the 8th highest in the nation, at 14.74 suicides per 100,000 residents aged 15-24.
Firearms and suicide in Maine

• Firearms accounted for 57% of suicide deaths in Maine between 2000-2002 (91 per year).

• Since 1998, more suicides with a gun than violent crimes with a gun in any year.

• As of 2001, firearm suicide death rates are higher in Maine (6.7 per 100,000 individuals) than the national average (5.9).
## Guns and Suicide
### Suicide Rate 1994-1998 per 100,000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Households with Firearms</th>
<th>Firearm Suicides</th>
<th>Nonfirearm Suicides</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Men commit the overwhelming majority of firearm suicides

**Maine Suicide Deaths w/ a Firearm by Gender, 1990-2000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% Female</th>
<th>% Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>9%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center for Disease Control
Handguns have become the leading cause of self-inflicted firearm injury deaths in Maine.
Rural counties tend to have higher rates of firearm suicides.
Characteristics of Gun Crimes and Offenders
4 questions

1) What are the characteristics of the gun offender?
2) What is the geographic distribution of gun offenses?
3) What are the characteristics of the gun incident (circumstances, relationship to victim, etc.)?
4) What are the characteristics of the gun?
1) Examination of 93 state crime incidents with a firearm from 2002-03
   • Descriptive analysis of the following:
     – Offense type and circumstance
2) Examination of 120 federal firearm offender characteristics from 2002-03
   – Demographic profile of offender
Characteristics of state gun crimes
n=93

• 21% of the cases were DV related

• 42% were drug/alcohol related offenses

• 64% of the offenses were committed with a handgun
The three highest state firearm charges were the following:

1. Robbery (30%)
2. Burglary (12%)
3. Assault (11%)

60% of the firearm charges were against a person (i.e. robbery, assault, murder)

24% of the firearm charges were property crimes (burglary, theft)

12% of the cases the victim was the spouse or boyfriend/girlfriend of the offender
Who is committing gun crimes in Maine? 
(n=121)

- Nearly 90% (89.1) are white males
- Average age: 34
- More than half (53%) are either unemployed or disabled
- 85% have at most a HS/GED degree
- Most have a prior criminal record (87%)
Educational Attainment of Federal Firearm Offenders

- Less than a HS degree: 34%
- GED: 30%
- HS: 21%
- More than a HS degree: 14%
- N/A: 1%
Less than ¼ of the offenders work full-time

- Unemployed: 42%
- Disabled: 12%
- Part-time: 24%
- Full-time: 22%
History of the Offender

- History of alcohol/drug abuse (76%)
- Many have a history of mental illness (43%)
- 34% have a history of both alcohol/drug abuse and mental illness
At the time of arrest, the majority of offenders were prohibited from owning a firearm.