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There were 14 homicides in Ottawa in 2023, slightly lower than 2022

There were 14 homicides and 72 shootings in 2023, compared to 15 homicides and 60 shootings the year prior.

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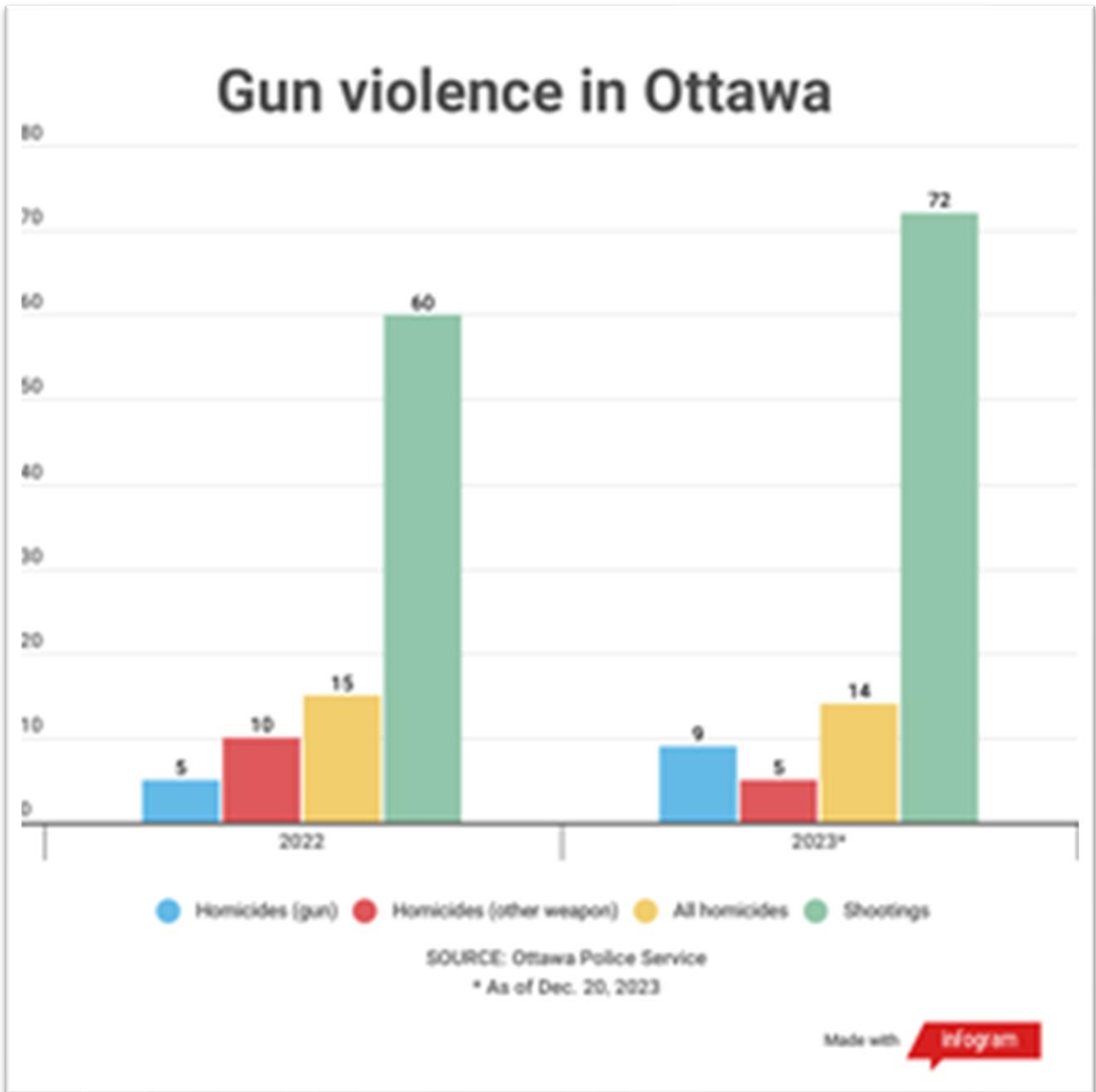


OTTAWA - Nov 23, 2023 -- Police investigate an early morning shooting in Ottawa's Centrepointe neighbourhood. Officers were on scene responding to a homicide. PHOTO BY TONY CALDWELL /Postmedia

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Daytime gunfire in the ByWard Market. A slaying along a walking path near a quiet suburban Orléans street. Bullet holes lodged in a bystander's home. Two shot dead at a late-summer wedding reception.

These were just a handful of the headline-grabbing shootings and homicides in Ottawa in 2023, a grim summary of a violent year in the national capital. There were 14 homicides and 72 shootings in 2023, compared to 15 homicides and 60 shootings the year prior.



These grisly statistics only hint at a host of traumatic events, including a pair of shootings with multiple victims.

On June 10, a shooting on Clarence Street injured four people. A 17-year-old boy, his identity protected by provisions of the Youth Criminal Justice Act, was subsequently charged.

Then, in early September, gunfire broke out at a wedding. Toronto's Said Mohamed Ali, 26, and Abdishakur Abdi-Dahir, 29, were shot dead in a convention centre parking lot. Six other men between the ages 25 and 35 were injured and taken to hospital.

No arrests or charges have been made in that case. Ottawa police have made public appeals for witnesses to come forward with information.

“The event, and how it played out, and the amount of people around, we know there are people who likely know more than they want to share,” Supt. Jamie Dunlop of the Ottawa Police Service’s serious and organized crime division said in an interview. “Whether they do it anonymously or want to share, we want more information.”

Dunlop noted shootings and violence were less frequent in 2023 than in other recent years. But, he added, “any shooting in an urban environment is concerning,” due to the proximity of bystanders.

Police Chief Eric Stubbs said he had a straightforward philosophy: “One shooting is too many.”

Shootings, Stubbs added in a recent interview, are often hard to solve due to “an association with a gang lifestyle,” which can make people hesitant to participate in an investigation.

Shootings 2018-2023



SOURCE: Ottawa Police Service
* As of Dec. 29, 2023

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Irwin Waller, a University of Ottawa professor emeritus and author of *The Science and Secrets of Ending Violent Crime*, says Ottawa’s gun violence stems from “a small group of people” from disadvantaged backgrounds who are “disproportionately involved” with a life of guns, “either as offenders or being shot as victims.”

Waller says gun violence in Ottawa is “eminently preventable,” but not by increasing police budgets.

“What I think is most sad about these trends is the myth that adding more police can actually reduce these things, when we know very clearly it doesn’t,” Waller said in an interview. “We know the sorts of solutions that are effective, and we know how to implement them. We’re just not doing it.”

Ottawa's 2024 police budget, at \$415.5 million, represents an increase of \$13.4 million from a year earlier. For 2023, police had received \$15.2 million more than in 2022.

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The 2024 budget includes hiring 25 full-time employees, and the police service's three-year strategic plan calls for 550 new employees, including 435 uniformed officers. During 2024 budget deliberations, Stubbs told city council the three-year plan was to "stabilize" the force, but wouldn't necessarily result in the "Cadillac gold-standard" in policing.

Stubbs says he's "completely supportive" of funding solutions to the "upstream" causes of violence, with more money put toward mental health and addictions, housing and supporting youth, among others, but not at the expense of the police service budget.

"Those are medical, social issues, separate from our role," he said.

With Ottawa's growing population and sprawling borders and a need to bolster the ranks that are being impacted by retirements and other absences such as medical leaves, the police force still needs cash to grow, Stubbs says. Ottawa's police service has received 17 per cent more calls for service in 2023 compared to 2022. "We have to react," he said. "We're obligated to go to those calls."

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That means Ottawa is "a long way away from having that conversation where I would say, 'We'll take no increase, we'll put \$15 million into housing or something,'" he said. "And it's needed, I'm not saying it's not needed, but, unfortunately, to be a thriving police agency that can properly serve this community, we need to grow and we need to stabilize."

Waller says there's a "short list" of options proven to work with the small group of people who are "disproportionately" involved in violence, including youth outreach, particularly targeting young men and boys.

The "Glasgow model," is one such proven solution, Waller says. The Scottish city was once Europe's murder capital, but its rate of violent crime was reduced by 50 per cent over the course of a decade. The strategy emphasized treating violence as a public health crisis with an eye to prevention rather than punishment. Waller said it was "particularly striking" when Toronto mayor Olivia Chow said the Glasgow model should be pursued after the death of Karolina Huebner-Makurat, a 44-year-old mother of two who was hit by a stray bullet midday while walking in the Leslieville neighbourhood.

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“I’m so pleased the mayor of Toronto has heard of it,” Waller said. “I’m not sure if our guys have. We need to expand on proven solutions and track results.”

Waller noted Ottawa’s 10-year community and well-being plan, which includes gender-based violence, violence against women, discrimination, marginalization and racism, does not directly address gun violence.

“We know the sorts of solutions that are effective, and we know how to implement them, we’re just not doing it,” he said. “If you took the equivalent of the last two years’ increase of the police budget and spent it on the things that are proven to work, we would reduce street violence, not just shootings and gun violence, but other sorts of violence, and gender-based violence, by 50 per cent over the next few years.”

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